DATTATREYA TRADITION
(DATTA-PARAMPARA)

VOL I - BIRTH, DEIFICATION AND ADVICE

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DATTATREYA TRADITION (*DATTA-PARAMPARA*) VOL I of Three Volumes

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PREFACE

More than a decade ago, from July 1997 to October 1999 I had published a ten part series titled DATTA-PARAMPARA in the magazine SAI - ARPAN, a quarterly publication of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Spiritual and Charitable Trust Mumbai, at the request of its President Dr Amiya Kumar Sahu. The series covered information on Shri Dattatreya, biographies of his four avatars Shipad Shrivallabh, Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Shri Manik Prabhu. In the later part of the series short biographies of some famous disciples of Shri Swami Samarth and of some famous Dattatreya Devotees were also included.

While writing the articles I was intrigued by many issues like when Dattatreya was born and what was the name of the Atri rishi who was Dattatreya's father. It struck me much later that in the Puranas as well as in the Epics whenever rishis were mentioned in the narrative of events they ere mentioned only by their generic family names such as Atri and Vasishta without specifying the actual personal name of the individual irrespective of the era in which the event occurred. This gave an appearance as if the particular rishi, if not immortal, lived throughout the centuries. Thus Atri is mentioned as one of the *saptarshis*, (the seven mind-sons of Brahma the creator) who marries Anasuya the daughter of Kardama rishi (or of Daksha according to some other Puranas) and is mentioned in connection with the activities of various kings in different generations that followed right upto the time of Rama in the Ramayana. I also subsequently realized that the so called *saparshis* were not contemporaries but lived in different time periods. Bunching them together as *Saptarshi* group was more of the typical Puranic symbolism than reality. This fact however has been traditionally glossed overby everybody whether he is a pious reader with tendency to believe everything in the "holy" text put before him or a discriminating scholar with capacity to discern fact from fiction. For example Dr P. N. Joshi in his monumental work "Dattatreya Dnyankosha" extols the qualities of Dattatreya's father Rishi Atri but what he actually does is list the qualities mentioned in the ancient texts against "rishi Atri" without considering the fact that these qualities did not belong to a single individual but different individuals who lived in different ages. He even mentions Shubhatreyi as a daughter of Atri not mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya. This was confusing until I came across the work of Shrikant Talageri (**The Rigveda- A Historical Analysis**) in which he lists the names of 37 different rishis of Atri lineage who have composed hymns in the Rigveda, but none of whom could be Dattatreya's father. I used to think mistakenly for some time that the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya were the same as the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the Ramayana ans was puzzled because Ramayana does not mention any children to this Atri couple and definitely not Dattatreya. But in the course of further reading my misconception vanished and was replaced by the questions: "What was the personal name of the Atri rishi who was Dattarteya's father and anasuya's husband?, "When did he live?

Analysing the problem, it was clear that what was needed was a chronological scale for locating the various Atris on a time-line and look for the plausible parents of Dattatreya. I had to turn to the works of the scholars in ancient literature. Fortunately I came across some works on the ancient Indian History, especially the following: (i) *Early Hindu India – A Dynastic Study* by A. Muzumdar in which the author has given a chronology and has tried to interpret the Puranic events in historical terms, (ii) the scholarly works of Mr M. R. Yardi (See Bibliography) on the present structure of Ramayana and Mahabharata in which he has shown how the original texts by Valmiki and Vyasa were corrupted by Romaharshan Suta, his son Sauti (fifth century BC), Harivanshakara (second century BC) and others who inserted chronologically absurd stories of their own imagination e.g. about Rama's meeting Vishwamitra and Parshurama both of whom lived several centuries earlier to him; (iii) the scholarly works of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*Retrieval of History from Puranic Myths*, *Vedic Religion and Culture* and *India in the Vedic Age*). Chronology of kings of the Aryan dynasties was obviously necessary to arrive at a solution to my doubts. This made me look to the chronology of events mentioned in the Puranas and the epics. Following the lead given by Muzumdar I attempted first to work out a chronology with the help of the genealogies of kings given in Bhagwat Pura-

na. When the names of the kings of the so-called Solar and Lunar dynasty kings were sequentially listed from Vaivaswat Manu onwards the results were found to be ridiculous. This tabulation showed Ramas's time as later than Krishna's and Yudhishtira was shown as not a contemporary of Krishna. Obviously the genealogies given in the Bhagwat Purana were corrupted. Finally the last mentioned work of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*India in the Vedic Age*) answered many of my doubts. Having found the anomalies Bhargava corrected for and explained the anomalies using the contemporous events mentioned in the various Vedic texts. Using the corrected dynasty list tables from Vaivaswat Manu onwards and using 1100 BC as the date of Mahabharata war suggestd by him it was possible to create a chronological table of kings and rishis assuming an average period of a kings reign. Different people have used different regnal periods from about 18 to 25 years. Bhargava suggests it to be 20 years. Therefore I made a chronological table with this value of regnal period.

Two questions then remained: (i) Which Atri was Dattateya's father who was also the father of Soma and Durvasa and whose wife was named Anasuya? (ii) Dattatreya is said to have had six disciples: Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna, king Alarka and Parashurama. It was necessary that times of these disciples match those of the Atri who was Dattatreya's father. Where the six disciples contemporary?

Literature search showed the following points: (i) None of the 37 Atris mentioned by Talageri were associated with Dattatreya. (ii) Only Ramayana Atri's wife was named Anasuya. (iii) The story of Kardama Muni's daughter Anasuya having married Atri as given in Bhagwat and some other Puranas is imaginary because Atri according to this story was one of the Saptarshis and the story of Saptarshi is a Puranic myth since the Rishis listed therein were not contemporary but lived in different ages. Also, Atri (and names of other rishis like Vasishtha, Bhrigu etc.) used in the Puranas are generic names or Gotra names and not individual rishi names. (iv) The six disciples can be divided into two groups: Prahlada, Ayu and Yadu who lived around Vaivaswat Manu's time while Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama who lived six centuries later.

A careful scrutiny of Bhagwat Purana which gives the stories of the encounters of Prahlada and Yadu with Dattatreya showed that they had met an *Avadhuta* which some translators conveniently interpreted to be Dattatreya though without any basis. As regards Ayu the story seems to have been taken from another context that showed Dattatreya's Tantric connection and is given differently in the Markandeya Purana. It was clear that Dattatreya could not have been the Guru of Prahlada, Yadu and Ayu and hence Dattatreya could not have been born in Manu's time.

Next, when stories of the births of Soma and Durvasa given in the Mahabharata and Puranas were scrutinized it was noted that Atri's son Soma was born as a result of shedding of the immense effulgence gained by Atri after a severe penance. It does not mention his mother at all nor does it mention Durvasa. Also Soma lived around Vaivaswat Manu time because Soma's son Budha was married to Manu's daughter Ila. As regards Durvasa he was born according to Mahabharata as an avatar of Shiva but in a yajna performed after the sons of Tripurasura were killed. He has absolutely no connection with Atri. This established that the Puranas by taking stories from different contexts and different times have synthesized the mythical legend of Dattatreya's birth. They have also used the name of Anasuya, wife of Ramayana Atri in the myth. But the pious devotees have accepted this myth and the image of Dattatreya in their minds is that of a Trimurti (in present times depicted by a three-head-six arm image) who is a celibate wandering yogi wandering over the earth to grace his devotees. However, Dattatreya's being a celibate is also in doubt because according to Mahabharata Dattatreya was a sage belonging to Atri lineage (not Atri Rishi's son) who was a householder and had a son named Nimi and a beautiful grandson named Shriman whose death had caused Nimi a great sorrow.

Coming to question of the time of Dattatreya's birth, it became clear that the only way to zoom in to this date would be through the time of his later disciples namely: Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama. According to the earlier mentioned chronology developed by Bhargava this came to be about mid-25th century BC.

That the real historical image of Dattatreya contradicted the Puranic image must have been glaringly obvious to many historians but it is not clear why no one had pointed it out. But even after having found it to be so I was hesitant to make these findings public lest I hurt the feelings of the pious devotees.

However on further thinking I realized that the pious believe many things which are illogical and historically unacceptable and they are not really bothered about facts but to the devotion of a deity fixed in their minds. I recalled reading that the character of Radha, Krishna's consort from Gokul whose devotional love for Krishna is legendary and has been the subject of innumerable amorous as well as devotional songs (*Bhajans*) is according to scholars an imaginary character. She is not mentioned in Mahabharata, or in Harivansha or in the Bhagwat Purana. But Radha-Krishna is a highly popular pair of deities worshipped by millions not only in India but abroad as well, and is the main deity of ISKON sect. Meerabai, Chainatnya Mahaprabhu, Narasi Mehta and many other saints reached a high spiritual level through their worship and have composed many devotional songs describing the devotional love between Radha and Krishna. Thus it is not necesary that the idol of worship or the object of devotion be real and historical and a devotee does not reall bother about such things.

I came across an interesting statement in the biography of the great spiritualist philosopher scholar Gopinath Kaviraj (1887 – 1976) which confirmed this view. The biography mentions the opinion of the then well-known Brahmo Samjist thinker who remarked in the context of vision of Shri Krishna which Aurobindo had while in prison, that "**Whether Shri Krishna was real or not had nothing to do with the vision because it is quite possible that Historic Krishna and Krishna as a principle can exist independent of each other. One would experience according to one's feelings on the subject. Examples of these can be found in all religions including the Christian. Every saint cannot be a liar. The object of your devotion will make Itself appear according to how you imagine It to be**." Thus, a pious person will stick to his beliefs whatever may be evident intellectually. This gave me the impetus to write (in Part II) about issues like the concept of an avatar which the pious believe intrinsically and quote Bhagvad Gita which says that Bhagwan takes an avatar in different yugas to punish the evil, to save the saints and establish Dharma or the righteous way of life. The pious of course do not ask why there were no avatars to counter the atrocities of Hitler and the communist dictators or for that matter the present terrorism. No doubt these worldly issues and the spiritual domain are mutually exclusive.

The original Datta-parampara series did not give details of Dattatreya's advice to the disciples. I have included it in this book and summarized the advice to Parashurama given in the Tripura Rahasya even though it is somewhat removed from the spiritual practice of present day devotees.

After finalizing the first volume I gave a printed copy to my good friend and neighbor Mr. Gangadhar Gangathade I am grateful to him for pointing out some errors like the birthdates of Krishna and Yudhishtira which I have since corrected.

This work is currently available at the URL: www.vvshirvaikar.de which belongs to my good friend Mr. Dietrich Platthaus of Essen Germany. His help in putting it on internet and his critical comments have been invaluable.

I offer this at the feet of my guru Shri Shankar Maharaj without whose grace this work would not have been possible.

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PART I

HISTORICAL DATING OF DATTATREYA'S BIRTHDAY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Devotees of Lord Dattatreya worship him in an image created by the Puranas viz. as an avatar of Vishnu born to rishi Atri and his wife Anasuya along with two more sons Soma and Durvasa who are avatars of Brahma and Shiva respectively. Atri is one of the seven mind-sons of the creator Brahmadeo and Anasuya is the grand-daughter of Swayambhuva Manu married to Rishi (or Prajapati Kardama taking the era of Dattatreya's birth almost to the beginning of the Creation. The full moon day (Purnima) of the month of Margashirsha (ninth month according to the lunar calender) that falls in December is assigned as the day of Dattatreya's birth. Though originally depicted as an ascetic or *avadhuta* dressed in tigerskin carrying a only *kamandalu* (a gourd water-pot) as *sanyasis* do, his three-in–one personality that combines the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva has led to his depiction as a person with three heads and six arms, accompanied by four dogs representing the four Vedas and a cow representing mother earth. He is mentioned by various other names such as Avadhuta, Atrisuta (son of Atri), Anasuyasuta (son of Anasuya) and Trimurti and described as Digambara or the one with only the directions as his clothes i.e. naked as many *avadhutas* are described.

In this part of the article some questions related to the birth and attributes of Lord Dattatreya are critically examined in the light of our ancient literature making use of the published modern work of eminent Orienatlists and Historians. The questions include: (i) Is there really any truth in the birth legend of Lord Dattatreya given in the Puranas which devotees accept to be true? (ii) Is Lord Dattatreya a historical person or a mythical character? (iii) Who were really the disciples of Lord Dattatreya? (iv) When was Dattatreya born and what were the names of his parents?

When the author arrived at the answers to these questions they were surprising and even shocking as wouild be seen from the next section "**Section 1.1 Summary of Conclusions"**.

Answers to these questions are surprising and even shocking. Besides discovering that almost all the legends are myths It may be mentioned though prematurely that

Readers should note that this part of the article concerns mainly with history and not spirituality. The spiritual aspects of Dattatreya worship are discussed in the next part.

1.2 Types of information used For arriving at the answers to the above questions the information from three types of sources has been critically examined. The **first type** is the information related to Lord Dattatreya and Atri Rishi from ancient literature, specifically Rigveda, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas.

The **second type** is the information given in books and other compositions in prose and poetry written by the devotees of Lord Dattatreya. These are obviously biased towards Puranic description about Lord Dattatreya. Puranas have had a deep impact on Hindu mind because over the centuries they have been the main medium of moral and religious education for literate land iliterate Hindus in India, especially in Rural India where visiting religious leaders and *kirtankars* (givers of religious discourses) have been giving discourses during the various religious festivals and even otherwise in the temples. Even though their place has been largely taken by religious films and TV serials, the themes of the latter are also based on the Puranas.

Most pious Hindus accept or have accepted the stories in the ancient literature as sacrosanct and true even when there are glaring internal contradictions in the details given in the various books. It will be shown later in the article that a large number of stories in the Puranas are myths but notwithstanding this almost all pious readers, even the scholarly ones who would be expected to be analytical and discerning,

believe in these myths because almost all pious readers have an intrinsic fear that they might be committing a sin if they were to disbelieve the stories and worse, utter their disbelief in public.

In the Puranas Rishi Atri is mentioned as one of the *saptarshis*, (the seven mind-sons of Brahma the creator) who marries Anasuya the daughter of Kardama rishi (or of Daksha according to some other Puranas). He is associated with the activities of various kings in different generations that followed right upto the time of Rama in the Ramayana. In reality, the creation of *saptarshis* as mind sons of Brahmadeo is a myth because thse seven rishis belong to **different eras in time** Secondly, as will be discussed in more details later, Atri, Bhrigu, Angiras etc are family names of the rishis. They are not names of individuals. Atri who might haver lived in Swayambhuva Manu times would be a remote ancestor of the Atri in the Ramayana. But Puranas merely mention all these members of Atri lineage as Atri rishi craeating a false impression that the same rishi lived throughout the ages. This fact however has been traditionally glossed over by everybody whether he is a pious reader with tendency to believe everything in the "holy" text before him or a discriminating scholar who is supposed to possess capacity to discern fact from fiction. For example Dr P. N. Joshi in his monumental work "Dattatreya Dnyankosha" extols the qualities of Dattatreya's father Rishi Atri, but what he actually does is list the qualities mentioned in the ancient texts against "rishi Atri" without considering the fact that these qualities did not belong to the same single individual but to different individuals who lived in different ages. He even mentions Shubhatreyi (or Amala) as a daughter of Atri not mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya. Note that Shrikant Talageri (**The Rigveda- A Historical Analysis**) lists the names of 37 different rishis of Atri lineage who have composed hymns in the Rigveda, but none of whom could be Dattatreya's father. Then the question arose: How could Anasuya be the name of the wife of rishi Atri throught the generations of the Atri family?

This kind of ignoring or suppressing the chronological element is typical of the Puranic stories. This is not the nnly misguiding factor in the Puranas. I used to think mistakenly for some time that the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya were the same as the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the Ramayana and was puzzled because Ramayana does not mention any children to this Atri couple and definitely not Dattatreya. But in the course of further reading my misconception vanished and was replaced by the questions: "What was the personal name of the Atri rishi who was Dattarteya's father and Anasuya's husband?, "When did he live? Is the legend of Atri and his marriage to Anasuya in the Swayambhuva Mnau time correct as Puranas claim?

It is natural that the devotee authors of literature on Lord Dattatreya would only add to the myths partly to explain the older myths or to expand upon them, often to glorify the objects of their devotion i.e, Dattatreya. We see this happening in such literature on Lord Dattatreya e.g. *Dattaprabodha* by Kavadibua and *Dattamahatmya* by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati or Tembeswami.

The **third type** of information comes from the excellent analytical studies of the above mentioned ancient works published by western and modern Indian scholars. This information was the most vital in this study and will be mentioned in detail later.

1.1 Summary of Conclusions As mentioned earlier Puranas are silent on chronology except for the mention of yugas which is a nebulous concept not in consonanace with scientific facts. However the above analytical studies, especially the corrected lists of the Solar and Lunar dynasty kings, enabled construction of a Chronological framework which, when used with various other information from the above sources led to the following conclusions:

- Contrary to the belief that Dattatreya was a celibate yogi the above sources show him to be a householder born not to Atri rishi but to unknown parents of Atri lineage. It is in later life that Dattatreya seems to have renounced the family life and took to yoga and spiritual path.
- As would be expected of such a great master he had some eminent disciples whose names actually lead us to dating his birth. **Approximately 2450 BC appears to be the most plausible birth time of Dattatreya and conclusively proved the Puranic birth legend to be a myth** composed probably to cement the traditional conflicts between Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites.

- Puranas depict Dattatreya as an avatar of Vishnu which is disputable since the Nath sect considers him to be an avatar of Shiva which is not implausible considering that the nature of worship rituals in Dattatreya tradition are closer to Shaivaite traditions. Even in *Gurucharitra*, the holiest book for Datta-devotees, it is Shiva worship that is prescribed everywhere except in chapter (41st) where Vishnu worship is discussed in connection with *Ananatvrata* recommended to Sayandeo.
- It has been shown that the entire story of Dattatreya's birth to Atri and Anasuya is a myth. Atri is a *gotra* or lineage to which different persons belonged in different times and ages but the Puranas call all of them by the generic name "Atri Rishi" with wife's name as Anasuya.
- It also became apparent that Soma was son of an early Atri but his mother's name is not known while Durvasa was Shiva's avatar born though a yajna not at all involving Atri's name anywhere.

When Datta-devotees worship Dattatreya through his *sagun* i.e. material image what they worship in effect is the Dattatreya Principle, hence they should not be distressed by the findings about Shri Dattatreya's birth presented here even though these are contrary to the image of Dattatreya in his mind that has been created by the Puranas. As has been shown here, though the Puranas have been the main medium of moral and religious education for Hindus for centuries, , for historical reasons, redactors have distorted the real ancient history and religious thinking to such a deep level that chances of improvement are virtually non-existent. Fortunately, Puranas have not been able to distort the spiritual thinking because though Puranas speak of attainment of heaven and hell after death depending on the *karmas* that involve the body, in spiritual thinking and practices by contrast the stress is on Self-realization and attainment of bliss even while one still lives by means of control of mind to attain detachment (*vairagya*), desirelessness and suppression of ego. This is the real heaven for which one need not wait for death as Bhagvad-Gita explains. To be fair, some Puranas (e.g. Bhagwat Purana) do prescribe spiritual goal of Self-realization through the path of devotion (to Vasudeva Krishna). Hindu religion can survive only though Spiritual pursuit which requires purity of mind and not through the ritualistic worship with the narrow ideas of physical purity limited to baths and washing hands and feet.

2.0 TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Traditional beliefs about Dattatreya, as mentioned earlier, are based upon his image created by different Puranas. According to these beliefs,

- Dattatreya is an avatar of Vishnu born to Rishi Atri and Anasuya. Though an avatar of Vishnu he also possesses the attributes of Brahma and Shiva who also were incarnated in the Atri family as Soma and Durvasa respectively along with Dattatreya but who left their parents charging Dattatreya with their attributes. Hence Dattatreya is also known as Trimurti.
- Rather than a deity, Dattatreya is regarded morea person, a celibate *avadhuta*, a wandering Guru and a king among yogis (*Yogiraj*), who travels on earth showering his grace on worthy devotees.
- He is said to sleep at Mahur (Matapur), (about 300 Km away from Nagpur), bathes at Varanasi in UP, asks for alms at Kolhapur in Maharashtra and takes his meals at noon in Panchaleshwar on the banks of Godavari (near Aurangabad famous for the Ajanta-Ellora cave paintings). He uses his yogic powers to travel.
- He is believed to have taken four avatars in the recent centuries, these are: Shripad Shrivallabha, Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Shri Manik Prabhu of Humanabad in the old Nizam State, now in Maharashtra.
- Shri Dattatreya's birthday is traditionally celebrated on Purnima (Full moon day) of the ninth lunar month *Margashirsha* which falls in December.

This imprint on devotees' minds is based on the legends of the birth of Dattatreya in the Puranas. Lay people have an intrinsic belief in Purana stories. This is not surprising because over the ages, in the for hundreds of yeas in the pre-British era and even for a considerable time later Puranas have been the main

source of their religious, spiritual and moral education in the absence of printed books. Even illiterate people are exposed frequently to the stories in the Puranas as a part of the religious discourses by learned persons and sages held in temples usually during festive occasions. Puranic education pervades all aspects of Indian life since childhood. Even in normal talk it is customary to quote Puranic legends which fall on the ears of children and grownups throughout their lifetime guiding them to lead a life according to Dharma i.e. the code of righteous conduct.

A peculiar character of Purana tales is that to a large extent they are metaphorical and allegorical myths with an element of supernatural, with considerable exaggeration and devoid of any sense of chronology. When examined critically and interpreted properly the basis of these mythical stories can be discerned and one cannot but admire the brilliant literary ability and inventiveness of the composers of these stories that constitute a Purana. We must realize that we are referring to an era where scientific attitudes were absent and very little was known about why certain natural phenomena occur. A few examples of such interpretation are given later in Section 4.1.

We shall describe the legends of Dattatreya's birth presented in the Puuranas and later examine critically in the light of the historical analyses made and published by various scholars to assess the truth or otherwise of these legends. In the process, we shall also attempt dating the birth of the historical Dattatreya.

3.0 BIRTH LEGENDS OF DATTATREYA

In all these Puranic legends rishi Atri and his wife Anasuya are mentioned as the parents of Dattatreya, Soma and Durvasa. Atri is an ancient rishi who is one of the seven mind sons of Brahmadeo the god of creation. These seven mind sons are the seven famous rishis known as saptarshi whose names are: Marichi, Angiras, Atri, Pulastya, Pulahak, Kratu and Vasishta. Bhagwat Purana says that Anasuya was the daughter of Kardam rishi who was married to Swayambhuva Manu's daughter Devahuti.

Different Puranas give different versions of the story of the birth of these avatars. We shall quote here only two.

Legend 1 According to Bhagwat Purana (Canto 4, Ch 1) Brahma the god of creation, asked one of his mind sons Rishi Atri to procreate. Atri went to Riksha Mountain with his wife Anasuya where he performed a severe penance standing on one leg for hundred years living only on air, with a firm thought that "I surrender myself unto Him who is the master of the universe to give me a son like Himself." The gods were pleased. Brahmadeo, Vishnu and Shiva came to him riding their vehicles, the Swan, Garuda and Nandi the bull respectively. Bowing before them Atri said, "I bow before you Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, who have assumed your different bodies throughout the millenniums for the three modes of Prakriti (nature) viz. the creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe. He asked them to clarify his doubt as to how the three had appeared before him when, for getting a child, he was praying to and had concentrated his mind on One Great Lord of the Primary Principle. The gods explained that they are all part of the same Great Principle and gave him their benediction that they will be born to him as partial incarnations. Accordingly, three sons were born; the child born as an avatar of Shiva was named Durvasa, one born as an avatar of Vishnu was named as Datta and the third child born as an avatar of Brahma was named Soma (or Chandra).

This story seems to have been contrived to explain the Trimurti concept in the Hindu philosophy in which the formless, attributeless Brahman, in order to perform the tasks of creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe manifests itself as the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva having the attributes Raja, Sattva and Tama respectively. Brahma is assigned the task of creation, Vishnu that of sustenance and Shiva that of destruction.

Brahma Purana gives a similar story but adds that the couple was blessed also with a daughter named Shubhatreyi.

Legend 2 The following is the most popular version of the birth story and seem to have dominated devotees' minds: The wandering *Devarishi* (divine sage) Narada once visited Atri *ashram* where Atri's wife Anasuya welcomed him with great respect and fed him sumptuously. Narada, highly impressed by this

hospitality went to the abodes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and sang praises of Anasuya to their wives Saraswati (or Savitri), Laxmi and Uma respectively commending her hospitality and devotion to her husband but passed a remark that there was no other *pativrata* (chaste and devoted wife) in the universe as good as Anasuya. This made the wives very jealous. They nagged their husbands who conferred and decided to test what kind of *pativrata* Anasuya was and punish her if she was not. They came to Atri's house in the disguise of three mendicant Brahmins choosing the time when the Rishi had gone out to the river for his daily worship. They assured Anasuya that they were Brahmins and have come having heard that guests were offered food of their choice in their *Ashram.* They said they were extremely hungry and demanded to be served food immediately otherwise they would go elsewhere.

Anasuya immediately made obeisance to them, offered them seats, washed their feet and worshipped them with sandal paste and flowers. She seated them, set leaf-plates before them and began serving food. But the guests stopped her and insisted that she should serve by becoming naked or else they would leave. Deciding that it would not be good for her husband's reputation if the guests left dissatisfied, she asked them to wait and went into the kitchen to remove her clothes. Concentrating her mind on the feet of her husband, she removed her dress and said in her mind, "The guests are like my babies and therefore I need not feel ashamed." Now, these were the thoughts of a *pativrata* and had power in them. When Anasuya came out of the kitchen to serve the Brahmins she saw the three of them had really turned into babies and were crying from hunger. Frightened, she went back to the kitchen to get dressed and returned. Anasuya lifted the babies one by one and held them to her breast to feed them.

Now, in the three heavenly abodes the wives were waiting for their husbands to return after disgracing Anasuya. But since the gods were stuck in Atri’s home they could not return home for a long time. This caused the wives a great deal of anxiety. Finally, they came to Anasuya, praised her and got their husbands back after giving a boon to Anasuya that their husbands would be born as her sons.

(The *Gurucharitra* gives a slightly different version in which it is Indra who fears the power of Anasuya from her being a *pativrata* and induces Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to test her.)

The Trinity stayed with Anasuya who named Brahma as Soma or Chandra (Moon), Vishnu as Datta and Shiva as Durvasa. Durvasa told Anasuya that he was a Rishi and was going away for penance and pilgrimage. Chandra said that he wants to go immediately but he will remain in the sky so that she can always see him. They said that Datta who was Vishnu's form would remain with her and he would be endowed with their attributes also and make both of them happy. So saying, Soma and Durvasa went away leaving Dattatreya as the combined form of the Trinity with Anasuya.

Legend 3 Markanda Purana (also Vayu and Kurma Puranas) give another legend which greatly extols the *Pativrata* virtue of Anasuya. A simplified version of this legend is as follows:

In ancient days, there lived in Pratisthan, a Brahmin who was afflicted by leprosy due to his past *karmas*. His wife was a *pativrata* (virtuous and chaste, serving her husband with devotion) who, in spite of her husband being a leper as well as a bad tempered person used to worship her husband. The husband was in the habit of visiting a prostitute but reached a stage when he could not go to her by himself. One day, he ordered his wife to carry him to the prostitute and she, *pativrata* that she was, carried him on her shoulders and proceeded towards the prostitute’s house.

Now, on the earlier day there was a theft of ornaments in the city. The police were chasing the thief who came across a man sitting in meditation. To save himself the thief put the stolen ornaments in that person’s lap and escaped. The police caught the sitting person and having found him in possession of the stolen goods, arrested him and took him to the king. As was the custom of those times, the king ordered the person to be given death penalty by mounting him on a spike (*Shula*). The police executed the punishment and left the person to die on the spike.

The person who was mistaken for the thief was actually a Rishi named Mandavya who was sitting in meditation when he was encountered by the police. In the darkness of night, the woman stumbled and hit Rishi Mandavya with her husband’s body. In pain, the Rishi uttered a curse that the person whose body touched and hurt him would die at sunrise. The woman, with her power as *pativrata*, stopped the sun

from rising so that her husband could not die. This created a great confusion on heaven and earth. The world remained in darkness. People could not perform *yajnas* and since there were no offerings to gods they remained hungry. The gods were worried that the whole world would come to an end. On Brahmadeo's advice they approached Rishi Atri's wife Anasuya, famous for her being the best among the *pativratas* and made obeisance to her singing her praises. On their request Anasuya agreed to plead their case to the Brahmin *pativrata*, went to her and explained the circumstances to her, promising her that she would bring her husband back to life. The *pativrata* removed her curse and the daily routines of the world resumed as usual. As soon as sun rose in the morning, the Brahmin died but Anasuya not only resurrected him by her powers but also turned him into a handsome young man.

The gods were pleased and asked Anasuya to seek a boon. Anasuya prayed that the trinity of Brahmadeo, Vishnu and Shiva should take birth as her sons. In the course of time the three gods took birth from the womb of Anasuya

Brahma was born as Soma, Vishnu was born as Dattatreya and Shiva was born as Durvasa through the boon granted by the gods. Soma, ever causing creepers and medicinal plants to grow with his cool rays, abides in Swarga (heaven). Dattatreya protects offspring from destruction by the malignant Daityas and being Vishnu's portion he must also be known as the benefactor of the docile. Durvasa destroys the scorner assuming a formidable body which is haughty in look, mind and speech.

(There is an interesting sequel to the Mandavya story given in Adiparva of Mahabharata. On death Mandavya went to Yama the god of death and asked him what was the sinful *karma* (action) he had done that had made him suffer by death on a spike. Yama, the most knowledgeable about ethics said that when Mandavya was a three year old boy he had hurt a butterfly by sticking it with a thorn and hence he was made to suffer this way. Mandavya however admonished Yama for his ignorance of the rule that children who are not in a position to know what sin and merit was cannot be held responsible for their actions. He said that children below the age of fourteen should not be held responsible for their deeds and cursed Yama that he will have to be reborn on earth for this negligence. Accordingly, he was born as Vidura, half brother of Pandu and Dhritarashtra. When Kaurava king Vichitravirya (Bhishma's stepbrother) died childless, as per the custom of those days, his widowed queens Ambika and Ambalika opted for having sons by the Niyoga system by which they could have children from the late husband's elder brother. Now, since Bhishma had taken an oath not to get children this task fell on the shoulders of Maharshi Vyasa who was the stepbrother from the mother's (Satyavati's) side. Thus were born the anemic Pandu and blind Dhritarashtra fathers of the Pandavas and Kauravas respectively. Now one of the slave girls in the palace also desired to have a child from Maharshi Vyasa who obliged and became the father of Vidura who came to be a very learned person.)

These birth stories from the Puranas are very dear to Dattatreya devotees who not only have allotted a birth-date (Margashirsha Purnima) but composed even lullabies for the child Dattatreya.

In later parts of this chapter it will be shown that these stories no doubt are myths. But before doing that it is necessary to know two important topics that will greatly assist in the discussions. These are:

1. *Sources of information and its reliability* and
2. *A chronological framework*,

4.0 SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND THEIR RELIABILITY

Vedas (and especially Rigveda Samhita), Upanishads, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas are obviously the main sources of information about Dattatreya.

Even more important than these basic texts are:

- *The <u>annotated</u> translations of the above texts in modern European and Indian languages and*
- *The commentaries and critical reviews on the above texts by learned scholars and historians of modern times in the British and post-British* era.

Hindu readers are conditioned to consider ancient texts to be holy and their contents sacrosanct. It is in Hindu tradition to accept a written word and not to contradict the elders. Very few individuals are bold enough to express doubts about even obviously absurd or conflicting parts of the ancient texts because not only it is against tradition but also for the fear they may be committing a sin. Another deterrent is that sometimes, these texts explicitly contain threats of dire consequences of different kinds of hell if any doubt is expressed about them. However, a careful intellecttual reading of these texts, especially the epics and the Puranas will show glaring absurdities and contradictions within the texts, with other works and with scientific reality.

Now, conclusions drawn from any kind of information can be reliable only if the input information itself is reliable. Scientista call this the GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out). It will be seen from the forthcoming discussions that except for Rigveda, the other sources have been subject to many spurious changes and additions at different points of time. It is an established fact that every aspect of life be it social, political, religious or that of technological advance, changes over time. The texts added later reflect the contemporary state of socio-political situation and technological progress. For example, if the interpolated texts written when iron was in widespread use are added to an original text pertaining to stone age or copper age then it is bound mention the use of iron and this would naturally create an incorrect impression that iron was being used during the era when the original events ocurred. Or say text referring to Shiva worship has been written during a period when Shiva worship was popular and added to a text pertaining to a period when Shiva was not even heard of then also an incorrect impression of the religion and society would be created. Or if the original text contains references to a palace in an era when construction technology was not at all developed than true picture of such a palace cannot be better than a glorified hut in today's view. But for a modern reader a place is a huge stone building with large halls and other luxury facilities. Information must therefore be properly weighed before drawing conclusions from its use. Unfortunately now the motion picture and TV industry have entered the picture and viewers are presented with unrealistic scenes of gigantic stone palaces in movies based on Puranic stories supposed to have occurred during an era when such construction was not at all feasible. Commentaries and critical reviews on the above texts by learned scholars and historians therefore become extremely important, even more than the original texts themselves.

Western scholars who were first introduced to the ancient Hindu literature in early British days in India were greatly influenced by and attracted to its deep philosophy contents. In his preface to the English edition of the Gita by Sir Charles Wilkins, Warren Hastings, the first British Governor General of India, declared towards the end of the eighteenth century. "*The writers of the Indian philosophies will survive, when the British dominion in India shall long have ceased to exist, and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrances.*" (See Blog1 in Bibliography). Their thirst for knowledge was so strong that in order to be able to read and understand the literature they first acquired a sound knowledge of Sanskrit as well as other ancient languages like Pali and some main Indian languages. The texts which were prohibited to be read by non-Hindus and non-Brahmins in India became available to them easily by virtue of their power as rulers. Not only that, the same Brahmins who prevented non-Hindus and non-Brahmins from access to the holy texts helped the western scholars to learn Sanskrit and translate the texts into English. The western scholars not only translated these texts into English and other European languages, but also subjected the texts to critical research using various techniques in etymology, philology, linguistic analysis, various branches of science like physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, mathematics, statistics, and archaeological data; then cross-referenced it to other texts so as to learn whatever they could about the texts and the authors.

This had never happened in India before in the Pre-British days, mainly because Indian psyche lacks the sense of enquiry and courage to question the statements of the ancients. For example there are six *darshanas* (Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Purva-mimamsa and Vedanta) that hypothesise, using logic and philosophy on the matters related to the structure and formation of the universe. But most Indians would accept all of them with equal piety. They would not ask themselves which of the six is really true since all cannot be true, they will not bother to check the contents against the modern scientific facts and worse, they will accept all six even though they give six different explanations about the universe.

But these western scholars and later, the Indian scholars trained by them, using the techniques mentioned earlier, dated the texts, tested their genuineness, whether redactors have made any additions and alterations to the original text, identities of the redactors making these alterations and identified the alterations wherever possible. It is now known from their analyses that over the years many books have been victims of redactions with spurious texts leading to conflicting and doubtful information. But though obvious, nobody has ever doubted or questioned any of the texts or the epics or the Puranas, most people taking them to be holy and sacrosanct.

Several years of research has led to a wealth of information on ancient Indian history and culture. These scholars newly introduced to the Indian texts initially thought that Krishna and Rama and events like the Mahabharata war were imaginary but as evidence grew they not only admitted that the persons and events were real and historical but even tried to fix dates for them.

One good outcome of this historical research is that a fairly reliable list of the Aryan kings of the Solar and the Lunar lineages who ruled India from Vaivaswat Manu onwards have now been prepared and are useful for making a Time-line of the ancient events (See later). With the help of these analyses it is now possible to identify whether a given piece of information in the ancient texts is likely to be real or a myth and when it would have occurred.

These analyses have established that only Rigveda Samhita has remained largely uncorrupted while in the case of both the Epics redactors have made extensive alterations in the original texts and added a very large volume of new text. Unfortunately not many people know or bother about these redactions and take the texts at face value with great piousness. Regarding Puranas, it may be mentioned that all the 18 Puranas of today have evolved from an original single Purana Samhita by Maharshi Vyasa each with its own variations from the original introduced by priestly authors of low caliber, even though claims are made that Maharshi Vyasa was the author of all the 18 Puranas. (See section 4.2 later).

4.1 Referred Prominent Scholars: In this study the work of the following researchers has been used to examine the legends about birth and early life of Dattatreya and how he came to be a deity. These are: (i) **Mr. M.R. Yardi** who has used statistical analysis on the distribution of syllables in the verses (*shlokas*), which are in the *Anushtubha* metre, to identify the styles of the original authors of Ramayana and Mahabharata (Valmiki and Vyasa) and those of individual redactors thus separating the contribution from each. This work was done at and published by the famous Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune. (ii) **Dr P. L. Bhargava** a research scholar of international repute who has critically studied the Vedic literature, the Epics and the Puranas, has identified many ridiculously false stories from the Puranas, studied the redactions to the Ramayana, commented on many misconceptions about Vedic deities etc. In the present context his greatest contribution may be considered as the preparation of the chronological lists of rulers of the Solar and Lunar dynasties and rishis associated with them. He also suggested parameters by which a chronology could be constructed. This required many non-conformities within the Purana lists to be removed using extensive cross-referencing of the synchronous events (like marriage, wars, yajnas etc.) in the ancient literature. His analysis gives a far better and realistic picture of ancient Indian history. (iii) S. G. Talageri whose analysis of Rigveda brings out the relative chronological sequence of the compositions of hymns in various *mandalas* and the geographical background of the times. Works of these authors and other publications used in this work are listed in the Bibliography. They should be read in the original.

<u>*Reference scheme:*</u> References to the above authors who are more frequently referred to, are given in the text by abbreviated letters as follows:

P.L.Bhargava: **B-VA**: *India in the Vedic Age*; **B-VRC**: *Vedic Religion and Culture*; **B-RH**: R*etrieval of History from Puranic Myths*;

M.R.Yardi: **Y-MB**: *Mahabharata, Its Genesis and Growth*; **Y-R**: *Ramayana, Its Origin and growth*; **Y-BG**: *The Bhagvadgita as a Synthesis*.

We now give a short account of (i) the redactions made to the Epics and (ii) how so many Puranas came to be evolved from a single Purana Samhita by Maharshi Vyasa.

Though Puranas are later than the epics we shall first start with the Puranas because they are the key to the chronology of ancient events, an important factor usually ignored in our religious literature but needed here for appreciation of Dattatreya history.

4.2 Development of the 18 Puranas The importance of the Puranas in the moral and religious education in India over the ages and especially in the pre-British era has already been mentioned.

How the various Puranas evolved from the original Purana Samhita of Maharshi Vyasa has been beautifully described by Dr Bhargava (in **B-VA** pp 20-40). A brief summary of the same is given in the following:

Traditionally it is believed that all the 18 Puranas are authored by Maharshi Vyasa. This is a misinformation. According to historians, based on statements in the early (Vayu and Matsya) Puranas themselves, there was only one Purana Samhita in the beginning written by Maharshi Vyasa. This Samhita contained the record of kings and rishis from ancient times and legends of their activities. Existence of a work called Purana or Itihasa-Purana in the Vedic period is mentioned in the Samhita and Brahmana literature. In Atharvaveda V (XI 7, 24) also it is mentioned that there did exist a Purana. Maharshi Vyasa must have composed the original Purana Samhita based on this Vedic Purana.

There were continued additions to this Purana Samhita during the subsequent post-Vyasa generations and reached the final version of the Samhita five generations later, in the reign of king Adhiseemakrishna (about 1225 BC) of the Bharata lineage. (**B-RH** Ch 9 p 85, Roy Chron, row 196). According to Vayu and Matsya Puranas this Purana Samhita was the basis of the 18 Puranas of today. These new Puranas are of sectarian nature but they have a common feature that all give the list of kings of the Aryan ruling dynasties. The first three Puranas: Brahma (also known as Adi Purana or the First Purana), Vayu and Matsya were written by Vyasa's disciples based on this original Purana Samhita during the reign of king Adhiseemakrishna.

It was the duty of certain court officials called *Sutas* to maintain the dynasty lists. (This S*uta* is different from the caste name Suta who used to be a person born of mixed caste parents and assigned the job of a charioteer as Karna's father was). Puranas are presented as dialogues between rishis and Suta Romaharshana (or Lomaharshana) and later his son Ugrashravas Sauti in which the rishis ask questions or request to be informed about some person or event and the Sutas reply through accounts of ancient episodes which do have some historical base but more often are mythical. Natural phenomena like phases of the moon which had no scientific explanations in those days are explained through mythical stories like that of Soma's (another name for Chandra or the moon) marriage to the twenty-seven daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Often, origin of names of persons is also explained through myths. These dialogues were not religious discourses which were the prerogative of the Brahmin priests; the *Sutas* were only entitled to narrate the stories of glories of kings from the Purana Samhita.

Vayu Purana was narrated to a group of rishis performing a twelve-year sacrifice in Naimishya forest on the bank of the sacred river *Drishadvati* by Suta Lomaharshna or his son Ugrashravas and must have been narrated elsewhere also. The legends delighted the listeners who liked the deeds of their ancient heroes and became popular. The ever increasing popularity was exploited by priests of different sects who began to appropriate the Puranas for expounding their own religious doctrines. Puranas began to multiply and even the old tales were revised to suit the purpose of different conflicting sects (**B-VA**: Ch 2 p 24). The priests who did all this were of inferior calibre temple priests and not learned knowers of the Vedas. (But they seem to have been talented enough to have added material, much of it myths, to increase the importance of the deities of their own temple - Auth)

In the new Puranas the older accounts became corrupted in various ways, e.g. giving wrong origin to dynasty lists and omission of some members; unrealistic exaggeration e.g. about long lifetimes and reigns (thousands of years) to the kings; number of their children (thousands); addition of absurd stories like Parashurama killing his mother on his father's instruction and her revival; the anachronistic story of Rishi Vishwamitra being lured by the apsara Menaka at the behest of Indra; use of family name of a Vedic rishi throughout the era without giving his personal name for glorifying the rishi's names like Atri and Vasishta, thus giving the false appearance that the same person lived throughout the ages; identifying different

persons by the same name and explaining the incongruities in absurd ways (like Vedic Rishi Kashyapa with Prajapati Kashyapa and rishi Bhardawaja's father Brihaspati with the divine guru-priest Brihaspati); introducing divine beings in the accounts of famous persons e.g. claiming their marriage with the daughters of gods, *gandharvas* and *pitris* and vice versa. All this was done by the writer priests to enhance the glory of the ancient heroes, to explain facts which authors themselves did not understand (e.g. the myth of Ikshwaku born out of Manu's sneeze and Jarasandha born in two halves being joined together by an old woman). According to western scholar Winternitz the theory of reincarnation (avatar) also seems to have arisen out of this sectarian corruption, in this case from the Krishna cult. One also notes absurd stories of gatherings of rishis separated by centuries and who are no longer alive only to get credence from blindly pious people.

The 18 Puranas are: Brahma, Vayu, Matsya, Brahmanda, Vishnu, Bhagvata, Garuda, Agni, Padma, Linga, Kurma, Markandeya, Bhavishya, Narada, Brahmavaivarvata, Varaha, Vaman and Skanda. They were written at different times with increasing number of myths in the later Puranas, the process of additions lasting until the end of the first millennium of the Christian era (1000 AD). Older the Puranas better do they agree with the Vedic evidence. The order in which these Puranas were written is as follows: (Brahma, Vayu and Matsya); (Brahmanda); (Kurma, Linga, Garuda, and Vishnu); (Agni, Bhagwata, and Padma); (Markandeya, Bhavishya, both giving little genealogy); (Narada, Brahmavaivarvata, Varaha, Vaman, Skanda which are sectarian). Later Puranas follow one of the three earliest Puranas. Texts of the Puranas other than the first three have been frequently edited and contain conflicting information. (**B-VA:** p 21). In addition to Puranas there are also 18 Upa-Puranas or Subsidiary Puranas. Devi Purana that extols the importance of Devi as the highest entity belongs to this class.

To qualify as a Purana it must include description of the following: (1) The creation of the universe, (2) Its destruction and recreation, (3) The genealogy of gods and *prajapatis*, (4) The reigns of the Manus (Manvantaras), (5) The history of the Solar and Lunar dynasty kings. But not all Puranas fulfill these requirements in entirety.

The concept of *yugas*, *kalpas* and *manvantaras* that describe the long term time scale are known to be totally inconsistent with the modern knowledge about time and creation of the universe but since they are not very rtelevent, they will not be discussed here.

4.2.1 Nature of Puranic Myths We shall now digress a little and touch upon the topic of the nature of Puranic myths. We have seen earlier that the original Purana Samhita by Maharshi Vyasa is the source of all the 18 presently available Puranas which were written by not very learned but highly sectarian priest writers belonging to different sects who added their own myths to bolster up the following of their sect and their deities. Modern thinkers believe that many Puranic myths were composed to explain natural phenomena for which no scientific explanation available in ancient times. When seen through modern eyes and in the light of modern scientific knowledge they appear to be absurd, however, considering the lack of such knowledge in those times one cannot but admire the inventiveness of the writers. Some stories were composed to explain the historical events metaphorically. But there are also many which are purely imaginary without any historical base. These include stories meant to extol the observances of *vratas* (like fasts or worships on certain days of the week or month).There are tales even to explain names of persons and places. Naturally many Puranic stories are fallacious, or metaphorical and being inserted by different authors at different time are also internally contradictory. In many stories persons from different time periods but having same or similar names are brought together and in this the custrom of naming the Rishis (and some kings also) by family manes has helped. Another confusing aspect of some stories are that whenever name of a Rishi is the same as that of a planet, the planet is personified and confused with the real person as has happened with the moon (Soma), the sun (Surya or Vivaswan) and mercury (Budha). We will now review some of the stories in the following with a view to indicatethe nature of Puranic myths and how they can be interpreted:

Story of Creation Most Hindus believe in the Puranic creation scenario in which Brahmadeo was first created in the lotus that sprouted from Vishnu's navel; he created this universe and the 14 planes including the earth, heaven and the nether (where hell is located); after creating the universe he created from

the power of his mind first four mind-sons (Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanatkumar) who refused to procreate; then he created the seven rishis (*Saptarshis*) as well as Narada, Bhrigu and Daksha Prajapati who also refused to procreate; finally he had to create Swayambhuva Manu and Shatarupa who were the first couple to procreate through conjugal process. Manu's two sons Priyavrata and Uttanpada continued his lineage but Puranas are silent about where their wives came from or who created them. Manu's daughters Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti (some Puranas mention only two daughters) were married to Rishi Ruchi, Rishi Kardama and Prajapati Daksha but Puranas do not explain how Ruchi and Kardama were born if there was no one other than Swayambhuva Manu to procreate at this time, or how Daksha Prajapati became a Prajapati when there was no *praja* (population) at all. Kardama-Devahuti's daughters were married to the seven rishis and thus Anasuya, one of the daughters becomes Atri's wife according to the Puranas.

Creation alternative Though Puranas credit Brahmadeo with the creation of the universe including the living universe, they also detail a very different and anachronist alternative story about the origin of various animal and plant species as well as the origin of gods and the demons. In this alternative, the credit goes to Rishi Kashyapa, son-in-law of Daksha Prachetas. Puranas actually mention two Dakshas, the first being the mind-son of Brahmadeo, a Prajapati and the son-in-law of Swayambhuva Manu (married to his daughter Prasuti). The second Daksha was a re-incarnation of this first Daksha and was known as Daksha Prachetas being the son of the ten rishis all named Prachetas who are shown as sixteenth generation descendents of Swayambhuva Manu in Bhagwat Purana. The first Daksha had sixteen daughters while the second Daksha had sixty daughters. Sometimes Puranas do not bother to mention which Daksha they are talking about because after all they claim; the second one is a re-incarnation of the first. Of these sixty daughters 27 were married to Soma or moon about which we shall discuss a little later. Rishi Kashyapa married first 13 of Daksha's daughters and then four more.

The alternative creation scenario for various life forms comes from this marriage between Kashyapa and the seventeen Daksha daughters whose children were as follows (Ref Bhagwat Purana Canto 6 Ch 6 and Vishnu Purana Ch 21):

1. Aditi gave birth to 12 sons who being sons of Aditi came to be known as Adityas. Thse were gods.
2. Diti gave birth to two sons Hiranyakshipu and Hiranyaksha who being Diti's sons were known as Daityas.
3. Danu gave birth to sixty-one sons who were called Danavas among whom Puloma and Vrishaparva are well known.
4. Timi gave birth to aquatic animals
5. Sarama gave birth to ferocious animals
6. Surabhi gave birth to cows, buffaloes and others with cloven hooves
7. Tamra gave birth to birds (Vishnu Purana says her six daughters gave birth to birds).
8. Muni gave birth to groups of angels (Apsaras).
9. Krodhavasha gave birth to the reptiles (and sharp-toothed monsters whether on earth, in water or in air acc to Vishnu Purana)
10. Ila gave birth the creepers and trees
11. Surasa gave birth all the ones of evil (many headed serpents travesing thesk.y acc to Vishnu purana)
12. Arishtha gave birth to Gandharvas
13. Kashthha gave birth the animals whose hooves are not split. (Rakshasas and Yakshas acc to Vishnu Purana).
14. Patangi gave birth the different species of birds,
15. Yamini gave birth the locusts
16. Vinata gave birth to Garuda the vehicle of Vishnu and to Aruna the charioteer of the Sun.

17. Kadru gave birth the serpents in their variety (chief among them were the chief amongst whom were Sesha, Vasuki, Takshaka, Sankha, Shweta, Mahapadma, Kambala, Aswatara, Elapatra, Naga, Karkkota and Dhananjaya

Though most Puranas are not bothered about this disparity, Vishnu Purana mentions that the creation through Kashyapa was during the reign of the second Manu (Swarochisa Manu), the first being Swayambhuva. The present Manu of our times is Vaivaswat Manu. When we examine the names of the Manus and compare the names with the list of Swayambhuva Manu lineage kings, we note that Chakshusa Manu was the eighth king in this lineage (Uttanpada line) while Manu Savarni was the name of a Vaishya commoner who became a rishi as was permissible in those days. He was contemporary of Nahusha and Yayati (sixth generation after Vaivaswat) and has composed Rigveda hymn with them. This goes to show that the Manu list and the time spans allotted to each Manu are false and arbitrary. Also, a question which nobody asks or answers is: Since Kashyapa, who created all the animal kingdom mentioned above, lived just prior to Vaivaswat Manu, were there no animals during the period between Swayambhuva Manu and Vaivaswat Manu?

Yugas Yuga is another Purana concept that needs comment. Information on yugas etc is one of the requirements for a Purana to qualify as one.

According to the Puranic definitions, there are four yugas: *Krita* (or Satya), *Treta*, *Dwapar* and *Kali* (with supposedly decreasing moral standards). These have lengths of 4, 3, 2 and 1 times Kaliyuga length of 432,000 earth years. Four yugas consecutively together make a Mahayuga of length 4,320,000 earth years.

According to the *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu), the length of one four yoga cycle is 4800 years + 3600 years + 2400 years + 1200 years for a total of 12,000 years for one arc, or 24,000 years to complete the cycle (one precession of the equinox). These are the earth years. However Bhagwat purana changed the definition of the year to be a divine year, taking one full day of the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons) to be made up of one solar year, the *Uttarayana* (northbound passage of the sun) period being considered as the daytime of the Devas and night-time of the Asuras and vice versa for *Dakshinayana* (southbound passage of the sun). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuga). The Divine year was thus made to consist of 360 Divine days. In this way Bhaagwat Purana extended the lengths of the Yugas by a factor of 360. Also it defined named the yugas as *Krita* (or Satya), *Treta*, *Dwapar* and *Kali* (with supposedly decreasing moral standards). This introduction of Deva year the time measurement very unrealistic since the length of even the smallest yuga viz. Kaliyuga becomes 432,000 earth years.

Swami Yukteshwar (Guru of the world famous Paramhansa Yogananda) and also spiritual luminaries like Shri Aurobindo, however dos not agree with this and maintain the manusmriti description. In his book “The Holy science” he explains that the yugas are basec on the shift in the timings of the occurrences of equinoxes. Currently, equinoxes occur on 23 March and 21 September. But these dates shift continuously and repeat after a cycle time of 24000 years. According to his hypothesis this occurs because the sun revolves around *another similar star*. He names the mystic centre of this revolution as ***Vishnunabhi***. The revolution brings the sun progressively closer, and then progressively further away from *Vishnunabhi*. The cycle of yugas takes place twice in each 24,000 year revolution. As the sun recedes from *Vishnunabhi*, the ages pass in the usual order: *Satya* 4800 y, *Treta* 3600 y, *Dwapara* 2400 y, *Kali* 1200 y. As the sun approaches *Vishnunabhi*, the *yugas* pass in the opposite order: *Kali, Dwapara, Treta, Satya*. He calls the yugas during the approach to *Vishnunabhi* 'as ascending' yugas; and those during the retreat from *Vishnunabhi* as 'descending' yugas. According to him, the most recent ascending *Kali* Yuga began in 499 AD and we are presently in the ascending *Dwapara* Yuga since 1599 AD, with consequent advances in human culture and knowledge. According to Shri Yukteshwar, the error was made in the Puranas and this occurred during the dark years of *Kali* Yuga when scholars misinterpreted the scriptures. Thus, by Shri Yukteshwar’s hypothesis, we are right now not in *Kaliyuga* at all but in *Dwapara Yuga.*

However, from astronomical considerations, his premise that sun revolves around another similar star is not correct. The nearest star for us, Alpha Centauri, is about 260,000 times farther from the earth than the sun is, or 3,868,800 crore kilometers. It is too far to have this effect.

Actually, the cycle time is not 24,000 years but 25,920 years and occurs because the earth axis precesses on account of its not having a perfect spherical shape and also because the Moon and other planets exert a pull on it. This effect was discovered by a Yugoslav scientist, Milutin Milankovitch (1879-1958). Shri Yukteshwar obviously could not know about this in his time. There are two more periods too, one of 41,000 years and the second of 93,408 years. But all these periods are far removed from the Puranic length of 432,000 years for *Kaliyuga* and 4,320,000 years for a *Mahayuga*.

Brahmadeo's day = 1 Kalpa or 1000 Mahayugas during which material world is created and destroyed in the end. This is followed by Brahmadeo's night of equal length; i.e. Brahmadeos day-night consists of 8,640,000,000 solar years. Brahmadeo's lifespan consists of 100 years, each year being of 360 day-nights. Fourteen Manus (legendary chief of mankind) reign during Brahmadeo's day after which the universe gets destroyed in a deluge and Brahmadeo's night of the same length as his day starts. Only Brahman remains during this night period and nothing else. Period of reign of each Manu is called a Manvantar. There are 14 Manus. Each Manvantar consists of 71 Mahayugas (306,720,000 earth years). Thus the period between the beginnings of two Manu reigns is 308,448,000 years. Names of the 14 Manus are: 1 Swayambhuva, 2 Swarochisha, 3 Uttama, 4 Taamas, 5 Raivata, 6 Chakshusha, 7 Vaivaswat, 8 Savarni, 9 Daksghasavarni, 10 Brahmasavarni, 11 Dharmasavarni, 12 Rudrasavarni, 13 Ruchi, 14 Bhuti. Currently we are supposed to be in the reign of Vaivaswat Manu and out of his reign 27 Mahayugas have already elapsed. We are in the Kaliyuga of the 28th Mahayuga. According to Suryasiddhanta the current Kaliyuga is supposed to have started on 17 February of 3102 BC. It is supposed to have started on the day Shri Krishna died. This was 36 years after the Mahabharata war. However historical studies supported by scientific data put the war to have occurred in about 1100BC.

Thus according to this counting, Universe was created 6 x 71 + 27 Mahayugas ago or nearly 8.6 billion (10^9) years ago.

Now compare this with findings based on modern science. The universe was created about 13.6 billion years ago as a onetime process of an explosion known as big bang. The solar system with our earth was created as an accidental occurrence about 4.6 billion years ago. It is not a cyclic but a chance process that created earth therefore cyclicity propsed by Puranas is not tenable. Primary life was created probably as an accident 2.5-3.8 billion years ago while man evolved only about 50,000 years ago in Africa from where he migrated to different parts of the earth. On the other hand according to Puranic scenario Brahmadeo created life including animals and man instantly by the powers of his mind. According to the Bhargava chronology Vaivaswat Manu lived about 5000 years ago i.e. in about 3100 BC while according to the Puranic time scale reckoning Vaivaswat Manu lived 27 Mahayugas or roughly 116.6 million years ago. If we revert to the original reckoning of the yugas without the factor of 360 we note that age of the Universe would be only 23.89 million years and Vaivaswat Manu time comes to about 324,000 years, still very large compared with the modern finding of 5000 years.

Aryan History before Vaivaswat Manu is rather sketchy. Bhargava states that Aryan lived in the Hindukush mountain ranges where a flood forced their migration led by Vaivaswat Manu to Sapatasindhu region. The history of Swayabhuva manu onwards upto Vaivaswat Manu is very sketchy. Thus, besides the moot point of whether Swayambhuva Manu was a historical person or not, his genealogy is not clear though there are prominent names mentioned in the Puranas in his genealogy like Priyavrata, Uttanpada, Dhruva, king Vena, Prithu and Daksha Prachetas etc. in the lineage. However the Royal Chronolgy prepared by Mohanka puts Swayambhuva Manu time at 6100 BC. (See Bibliography).

We thus see that the Puranic scenarios about creation and time scales are myths which unfortunately are ery difficult to remove from Hindu minds. Relevance of this discussion to the present subject will be seen when we note that Dattareuya is portrayed as great-grandson of Swayambhuva Manu according to the birth legends. His time therefore comes to 116.6 million years ago instead of in the 25th century BC as will be established later.

Personification of gods The Vedic gods are mostly powers of nature but earlier ancient Vedic people personified them assigning them a human or near human form and many human attributes. In the early Rigvedic times the deities Indra, Varuna, Vishnu, and Ashwins etc., who are Adityas are mentioned as *asuras* which in the early Vedic age meant powerful and wise but in later Vedic age the term *asura* attained the meaning of a demon. These gods are noted for their good qualities like valour, wisdom and compassion but Puranas assigned to some of them and particularly Indra the undesirable qualities of jealousy, anger, arrogance etc. Bhargava mentions that this is the handiwork of the supporters of Vishnu who wanted to boost Vishnu's image by the questionable means of malgning Indra.

In some Puranas this system of personification has been extended even to the inanimate Vedas and Yugas. By the time of the epics some older gods lost their importance, some new gods were added to the Hindu pantheon and they even married and had children. Thus we see Adityas increasing from the original three to twelve (**B-VRC**: Ch 3), Indra superseded by his junior Vishnu, Shiva added to the pantheon and married to Uma (Parvati) and having Ganapati and Kartikeya (Skanda) as sons. We also see both Brahma and Vishnu having wives.

In the Puranas we see conjugal disputes between Shiva and Durga, Vishnu and Laxmi, Brahma and Saraswati. Pious readers no doubt tend to forget that these gods are spiritual powers and the stories of conjugal disputes, meetings between the gods are merely myths written to make some point related to Dharma (code of righteous conduct). But Puranas mention meetings not only by gods but also by rishis who are mentioned only by their family names but who lived in different times. There is an understanding when using an analogy that its use should be limited to explain or prove a certain point but cannot be extrapolated beyond it or be generalized. But a pious reader unfortunately takes these stories literally. The audio-visual presentation of these stories by movies has further deepened this impression.

Deva–Daitya Wars Puranas mention of frequent wars between gods (Devas) and demons (mentioned by names Asuras, Daityas, Danavas and Rakshasas) in which sometimes Devas win and sometimes Daityas. In reality these wars were between different Aryan tribes who differed on the nature of worship. Initially Varuna was the greatest god of the Aryans, but in time many began to worship Indra instead of Varuna. According to Bhargava, Shukracharya, belonging to the Bhrigu lineage (great-grandson of Rishi Bhrigu) took up the cause of the opponents of Indra worshippers. Shukracharya became the priest of these Indra opponents. Brihaspati was the priest of the Indra worshiping Aryans.

Puranas depict gods as persons with divine powers. As mentioned earlier these gods are mostly natural forces or powers who are personified in the Puranas and assigned human qualities. Asuras, Daityas etc. however are in reality members of rival Aryan tribes to whom Puranas assign magical evil powers.

The term Danava is first used in Rigveda to mean Vritra, a fictious entity who is supposed to retain water in the clouds not allowing it to precipitate for the benefit of mankind. Indra is praised for killing Vritra and release the waters which means that Indra caused lightening (*Vajra* which is considered as Indra's powerful weapon) and caused rain to fall, according to the primitive understanding of the Aryans at that time. (**B-VA:** p 68-69). However Puranas have personified Vritra making him an Asura whom Indra kills using a weapon made frm the bones of rishi Dadhichi. (It is not clear what this weapon symbolizes.) Later, when enmities between Indra worshipping Aryans (whom we shall refer to as *Deva* Aryans) and Varuna worshipping Aryans (whom we shall refer to as Asura Aryans) started, the Indra-worshipping Aryans began to call the opponent Aryans also Danavas. A group of Aryan gods including Indra and Vishnu began to be called Adityas being depicted as sons of the mythical Aditi (meaning infinity. The enemies were naturally called Daityas the sons of mythical Diti, her sister. Mythical stories of creation were composed which Devas (Adityas), Daityas and Danavas were all shown to be sons born of rishi Kashyapa from Aditi, Diti and Danu who were daughters of Daksha Prachetas married to the Rishi.

The two groups came to be at war quite often. In the course of time Indra began to be considered as the king of the gods or Devas. The other group was mentioned by other names but in the Puranas, the wars are described as between Devas and Asuras. Sometimes the term Daityas, Danavas or Rakshasas is also used for Asuras. Sometimes the Deva Aryans won and sometime they. But in the long run the Indra supporting side won and the other side either got defeated and assimilated with the Indra supporting Aryans

or migrated to Iran where the term Deva began to be considered as evil and Asuras (Ahuras) began to be considrerd as good while in India it is the reverse.

In the long run the Deva Aryans prevailed. History is always written by the victors and in such a history the losers are always shown as villains and bad people. This has happened even to Kauravas after the Mahabharata war. The word Asura was used in early Rigveda period to mean the brave and powerful, but towards the end of the Rigvedic period it came to be used to mean the enemy Aryan tribes who were finally defeated. The term *asuras* also began to include tribes known as Danavas and Daityas. The Adityas were counted among gods while Daityas and Danavas were branded evil, always warring with gods or Devas. The story of this enmity is described in the famous story of Prahlada who though son of the Daitya king Hiranyakshipu, was a keen devotee of the Aditya Vishnu who took the Narasimha avatar to kill Hiranyakshipu in order to save Prahlada. Later, when Daityas were again powerful and Prahlada's son Bali rules the Saptasindhu region, Vishnu who was of a short stature (Vamana) again used a stratgem by pretending to be a Brahmin mendicant asking for a small piece of land thus creating the legend of Vamana avatara.

Whenever Daitya-Danavas (called *asuras*, *rakshasas* or demons in the Puranas) had upper hand and ruled over the Devas the latter rushed, according to the Puranas, to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the mother goddess Durga who then helped them to defeat the demons. This is chronologically incorrect for, (as will be seen later) during the era of these wars Shiva and Durga were not part of the Hindu pantheon, however that is another matter. In Puranas we read stories in which these main gods meet and confer, like politicians and diplomats of today, and plan strategies for defeating the demons sometimes by taking an avatar. This is obviously mythical.

In spite of the wars however there were social interactions between the two groups; e.g. Yayati of the lunar dynasty married the Danava king Vrishaparva's daughter Sharmishtha as well as Shukracharya's daughter Devayani. According to The Taittiriya Brahmana, Indra himself is said to have married Daitya Puloma's daughter Shachi Poulomi chosing her for his wife from a number of competing goddesses, because she surpassed them all in her voluptuous attractions. He also killed her father to escape from his curse. She has an interesting hymn in the Rigveda (X.159) that shows her pride in having impressed Indra. It runs thus

> 01: The sun has risen; my good fortune has dawned; I, knowing this, have obtained my husband triumphing (over my rivals). [Literally, this is a sukta of exultation by Shachi over her rival wives; Shachi also means an act, exploit; as a metaphor, the hymn praises Indra's glorious acts].
> 02: I am the banner, I am the head, I am exalted, soothing (my lord); my husband must conform to my will, as I am victorious over my rivals.
> 03: My sons are the destroyers of my enemies, my daughter is an empress; and I am victorious, my fame is most precious to my husband.
> 04: That oblation, O gods, has been offered by which Indra offering it has become renowned and most powerful; I freed myself from my rival wives.
> 05: Free from rivals, the destructress of rivals, victorious, triumphant, I cut up the brilliance and wealth of the other (wives of Indra) as if it were the wealth of (enemies) who do not endure long.
> 06: Triumphant, I conquered these my rivals so that I might rule this hero and his people.

It is not clear however how Indra, a divine non-human could marry a human being Shachi. But stories of the Divine and semi-Divine entities marrying and otherwise socializing with humans are not infrequent in the Puranas. It is also possible that Indra was originally a human being later deified and assigned qualities of the nature god that controlled rain and caused lightening.

<u>Slaying Invincible Demons</u> Another type of conflicts Puranas mention is with demons who became tyrants after obtaining a boon from Brahmadeo or Shiva of invincibility against any opponent and any weapon. Typical example is that of the Daitya king Hiranyakshipu who had a boon from Brahmadeo that he cannot be killed by man or an animal or any weapon or during day or during night. He felt safe and became a tyrant baning worship of Vishnu to whom his own son Prahlada was devoted. He even tried to kill his own son but failed. Vishnu then took the avatar of Narasimha (half man half lion) and killed him by tearing his abdomen by nails which is not a weapon at twilight which is neither day nor night. Most of these stories seem to have been composed to bolster Vishnu's image for the boons are obtained from only Brahmadeo or Shiva and almost invariuably Vishnu intervenes and kills the demon in such a way that conditions of the boon are met. There a however a few examples where deities other than Vishnu destroy the tyrant demon e.g. Tarakasur is killed by Kartikaswami (Skanda), Tripurasura and his sons by Shiva and Mahishasura, Chanda and Munda by goddess Durga.

Phases of the Moon The story of 26 daughters of Daksha marrying Soma or the moon is a typical example of how Purana authors tried to explain phases of the moon. In this story, Daksha had sixty daughters. Soma married twenty-seven daughters but soon 26 of them came to their father and complained that Soma was neglecting them by spending most of his time with only one sister Rohini. Daksha became angry and cursed Soma that he would suffer from tuberculosis and wane away. But Soma surrendered to Lord Shiva who took him under his protection and compromised by arranging that Soma would become grow weaker for a fortnight and slowly regain his strength in the next fortnight. This is an allegory in which the twenty-seven daughters are the twenty- seven star constellations through which the moon traverses the sky during a month. The tuberculosis reflects Moon's waning during the dark fortnight and the recovery is the waxing moon during the bright fortnight. Shiva's popular image depicts the moon on his head showing that he is under Shiva's protection.

Eclipses The eclipses of the sun and the moon are allegorically explained by the episode in the mythical story of *Amritamanthan* in which gods and demons churn the sea together to extract gems from the sea. The eclipse is said to occur because the demons Rahu and Ketu devour the two gods Sun and Moon but are unsuccessful. Sun and Moon are Aryan deities and are astrologically considered as planets; Rahu and Ketu are also considered as planets, but in reality are only two points or nodes in the Solar and Lunar orbits. However ancient people did not know this and managed their astrological calculations based on these assumptions. Unfortunately, even after knowing the scientific truth astrologers as well as lay people still talk of Rahu and Ketu as planets and use them for prediction of future. Sun and moon are also still considered as as planets in Hindu astrology though everyone knows that sun is a star and moon is a satellite of the earth.

Sun is depicted in the Puranas as travelling across the sky in a chariot of seven horses driven by Aruna, now interpreted to represent the seven rainbow colours of the of which the white light is comosed.

Let us consider two interesting allegorical stories given in the Puranas to explain certain historical events

Self-immolation by Sati Sati, one of the daughters of Daksha Prajapati (the first Daksha) fell in love with Shiva and married him against the wishes of her father who did not like Shiva because of the way he dressed in tiger skin and lived in the cremation grounds. During one of the *yajna* ceremonies in which all gods and rishis were present, Brahma and Shiva did not stand up to show respect to Daksha when he entered the hall. Daksha, out of ego, felt insulted but could not say anything against his father Brahma but he could not tolerate the insult by Shiva whom he considered of lower rank. In the next *yajna*, Daksha invited everybody except Shiva. Sati noted that gods were going for the *yajna* and insisted to Shiva that they should also attend it even though they were not invited. Shiva refused but after some nagging by Sati he did not prevent her from attending the *yajna* alone. When she reached her father's home she was insulted by Daksha who also uttered disparaging words about Shiva. This enraged Sati who jumped into the *yajna* fire and died. When the news reached Shiva he was furious and created the terrifying person Virabhadra ordering him to destroy the *yajna*. Virabhadra immediately went with his army and destroyed the *yajna* and killed Daksha and many other gods. Later Brahma intervened, Daksha was revived but with a goat's head and Shiva was given entitlement for *Yajna* "*Havirbhag*". This story is obviously allegoric to the

acceptance of Shiva as a deity in the Aryan pantheon. Initially, even after Aryans started worshipping Shiva he was not given "*Havirbhaga*" in the Yajnas being considered an outsider and hence not eligible, but now he gained equal rights for the offerings on par with other gods.

Spread of Aryan culture to the South Another allegorical story concerns the spread of the Aryan culture in the south India occupied by the Dravidians. It was rishi Agastya who travelled with his wife Lopamudra (probably accompanied by his toupe of disciples) to the South braving the difficult Vindhya Mountains. As in the many allegorical stories in the Puranas where inanimate objects and abstract entities are personified, here also Vindhya Mountain is personified and shown as a disciple of rishi Agastya who lived in around 2400 BC (seven centuries before Rama) as per Bhargava tables. The story runs like this:

Once Narad Muni visited Vindhya and praised him but with a sting as was Naradmuni's habit. He said, "You are great and beautiful but you are nowhere compared with mighty and tall mount Meru." This made Vindhya jealous and in anger he started growing taller and taller. This caused a serious problem because sunlight could not reach anywhere south of Vindhya during daytime. (Here one must remember that according to the ancient beliefs sun revolved daily around a mythical mount Meru located somewhere in Palmir region. So when the sun is to the south of Mount Meru it would be daytime in the Indian subcontinent.) This worried rishis and gods because rishis could not perform the daily rites and and gods had to go hungry because they did not get the offerings therefrom. The rishis and gods knew that Vindhya was rishi Agastya's disciple. So they went to Varanasi to meet the rishi and requested that he go south to Vindhya who would naturally bow before his Guru thus decreasing the height. Once he does this Agastya should tell him to remain in that pose until Rishi returns. Agsatya should continue going towards south so that Vindhya continues to maintain his reduced height which will cause Sun to be seen in India during daytime. Thus Agastya went south with his wife Lopamudra who herself was a great rishi. Vindhya continued to remain in the condition ordered by his Guru and rishis could perform their daily rites and feed the gods. Thus Agastya took the Aryan culture with him to the south India and spread there.

4.2.2 Depth of beliefs in myths There is no doubt that these mythical but brilliantly conceived legends composed by ancient writers to explain the natural phenomena and historical events are mere myths but then one should also admire the explanations proposed in an age when there was very little scientific knowledge so familiar tous today that we take it for granted forgetting that it is so only since two to three centuries.

For centuries we have not only believed in these mythical legends but built up further myths based on them. This applies to the legends about Dattatreya's birth also which people have believed for centuries and to which many talented devotees like have added more myths. Many have not only fixed the date and time of his birth but even composed lullabies to the child Dattatreya. Kavadibaba (Shri Anantasut Vitthal) for example writes in his book "Datta Prabodha" written in 1860 AD (supposedly on the instructions of Shri Dattatreya himself), a beautiful description of childhood days of Dattatreya and his two brothers and their pilgrimage together. When seen against chronological background it would be clear that the description of the pilgrimage is absurd because many of the places he mentions did not exist when Dattatreya is supposed to have visited them. He further expounds spiritual philosophy in great detail through the medium of a dialogue between Dattatreya and Anasuya (See Bibliography). Those details are no doubt fantasies created by the love of a devotee. On the other hand this exposition of the spiritual philosophy is like a "*satsang*" i.e. spending time in the company of a saint which is of great spiritual benefit to the reader. Datta-Mahatmya by Vasudevananda Saraswati (See Bibliography) is also similarly based completely on Puranic myths. When great yogis like Vasudevananda Saraswati, supposed to be *Trikaldnyani* i.e. know past, present and future through their occult powers, put their stamp of truth on Puranic myths how can one blame laymen to whom the Puranas are sacrosanct and word of God and who do not even question why different Puranas give different details about the birth of Dattatreya, Soma and Durvasa? Or question the Purana claim that Soma the person is the same as Soma the planet Moon?

Perhaps time has come for some enlightened religious institution to sponsor work of writing a single comprehensive Purana rid of all myths and and sectarianism and giving some credible chronology.

4.3 Mahabharata We shall now see how the original work composed by Maharshi Vyasa was corrupted by certain redactors. There is a traditional belief that shortly after the Mahabharata war (*ca.* 1100 BC) Maharshi Vyasa wrote a short account called *Jaya* of 8800 verses (shlokas) about the conflict between the cousins Pandavas and Kauravas. This is however disputed and some people believe that this book was called *Bharata* and had about 24,000 shlokas. According to Yardi's studies, rishi Vaishyampayana recited this story (called Bharata) in about 21,262 *Shlokas* during the serpent sacrifice performed by King Janamejaya about a century later. Five centuries later, Suta Romaharshana and his son Ugrashravas Sauti (who lived in about 450 BC) added 17,284 and 26,728 shlokas respectively (**Y-MB)**. This newly added text presented various topics like dynasty lists, philosophy, art of governance, ethics, religion and numerous stories extraneous to the main theme of the family feud. Yardi also concludes from his statistical analysis of Shlokas that it was Suta who changed the bias of the story from a neutral account to one biased towards Krishna cult presenting Krishna as an avatar of Vishnu and implying that Krishna knew in his lifetime that he was an avatar. He further shows that Gita was composed and added by Sauti who synthesized the various spiritual philosophies current in his time and presented four different spiritual paths all leading to *Moksha* (liberation), stressing the importance of devotion and surrender to God personified by him as Krishna in consonance with the *Pancharatra* philosophy of the Vaishnavaites. Bhargava however points out that Krishna has been presented as *Bhagwan* or god only in the middle six chapters of Gita (**B-VRC:** Ch 14). To be fair Mahabharata describes Krishna as a staunch devotee of Shiva whom he had propitiated to get children for Rukmini and later for another wife Jambavati. Yardi also concludes that in the 2nd century BC the author of Harivansha, whose real name is not known, added 9,053 verses. Another unnamed redactor, mentioned as Parvasangrahakara, also added further 1369 verses in the first century BC. Harivansha was later considered as part of the Mahabharata making its total size as of about 100,000 verses and which became virtually an encyclopedia of religious information. (**Y-MB)**

Mahabharata (and Ramayana too) have many absurd stories in which rishis and characters from widely separated generations meet just as in the Puranas. This is not surprising since the redactors Suta, Sauti and Harivanshakara had also their hand in writing the Puranas and Puranas also must have lifted a lot of material from the epics.

4.4 Ramayana Ramayana and its composer Rishi Valmiki have also been the victims of a lot of misinformation and redaction. In my childhood I remember having read and been told that Rishi Valmiki who wrote Ramayana was a contemporary of Rama and had written the events in advance even before they occurred. Valmiki has also been portrayed as a robber transformed to a Rishi after his encounter with *Devarshi* Narada. Responsibility of these aberrations lies mainly with Skandapurana, Adhyatma-Ramayana and one of the redactors of Mahabharata with the intention of somehow explaining the Rishi's name "Valmiki" by relating it to *Valmika* meaning an anthill. In reality Valmiki belonged to the lineage of Bhrigu and Chyavana. According to Vishnu Purana his personal name was Riksha. (**B-VA, B-RH**)

Same Mahabharata redactors viz. Suta, Sauti, Harivanshakara, Parvasangrahakara and another unknown redactor added as many as 9733 verses to the original Valmiki text of 8121 verses (Y-R: Annxs A & B). Original Ramayana had only six chapters. These redactors added a new chapter at the end called Uttarakanda with totally imaginary stories that describe exile of a pregnant Sita and her being sheltered by Valmiki. They also considerably expanded the first chapter Balakanda which was very small in the original text adding many imaginary stories. These redactors do not seem to have realized that that spinning stories like Rama's sending Sita into exile while she was pregnant and death penalty to the Shudra Shambuka actually malign the character of the great revered hero who is actually considered as ethics personified. (**B-RH,** Ch 2)

The redactors added many imaginary stories e.g. the story of Vishwamitra's visit to Ayodhya and Rama's conflict with Parashurama added by Suta (**Y-R** Ch 2). As seen from the dynasty lists, both Vishwamitra and Parashurama lived more than 30 generations earlier.

In the modified text Rama is shown as a Shiva worshipper and later, when Rama was considered an avatar of Vishnu, a tale was also made up to show that just as Rama worshipped Shiva, Shiva also worshipped Rama. Actually, as Yardi has pointed out there was *no mention* of Shiva in the original Valmiki Ramayana.

During Rama's time Vedic deities were worshipped with Indra as the greatest god and Vishnu as subordinate, hence known as Upendra.

By the time of the Mahabharata war Indra's importance waned and Shiva began to be worshipped. As seen from the *Bharata* text, in Vaishampayana's time five to six centuries later, Shiva was considered as the greatest god and was named Mahadeva (**Y-R:** Ch VIA p. 69, 70). However after Krishna's death Vishnu also began to gain importance. The concept of Vishnu's incarnations took shape and by Suta's time Krishna and Rama began to be considered as avatars of Vishnu. Thus it is natural that the redactors gave importance to Shiva-Rama mutual worship to appease both Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites.

According to Yardi (**Y-R**; Ch V p60) Valmiki and Vasishta were separated by one generation. He mentions the list of rishis compiled by Pargiter in which Vasishta (Dasharatha contemporary) stands at No 64 and Valmiki at No 66. This shows that Valmiki was not a contemporary of Rama but lived only a generation later and composed Ramayana soon after Rama's time.

Bhargava however gives a date which is far removed from Rama's time. He opines that Valmiki must have composed the epic in the seventh century BC. He arrived at this conclusion after carefully studying the comments of the two western scholars Jacobi and Winternitz and taking into account the fact that the language spoken in Rama's time was Vedic Sanskrit while the verses in the Valmiki Ramayana are in classical Sanskrit which came into use only around 800 BC. This implies Valmiki was not Rama's contemporary. Hence he could not be Narada's disciple also. This is couple of centuries before Suta and Sauti who must have included Rama's story in Mahabharata (**B-RH:** Ch 10). However we must also note that almost 55% of the new Ramayana text belongs to the redactors who used the classical Sanskrit and not the Vedic Sanskrit.

Bhargava concludes elsewhere (**B-RH:** p 36) that Valmiki based this epic poem on the tales current among the contemporary *sutas* narrating Rama's activities. This work was recited in public by professional rhapsodists who were called Kusilavas because of their patronage by kings who were descendents of Rama's sons Kusha and Lava. This custom must have lasted for several centuries.

4.5 Rigveda Samhita It is the earliest Hindu text passed down to us without any significant changes. It contains 1028 hymns divided into 10 *mandalas* but not arranged chronologically. The hymns composed by rishis praise the Vedic gods and pray for material benefits like wealth, success in wars, children, cattle and protection in general. The yajnas were peformed by rishis for themselves and for kings. The hymns exhibit an amazing poetic inspiration in describing the deities and events and are an invaluable source of information to the historians. The most famous hymn on Hindu tongues is undoubtedly the famous Gayatri Mantra (RV III; 62.10) composed by Rishi Vishwamitra:

Om Bhur Bhuvah Svah Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat

(*We meditate upon the auspicious godly light of the Lord Sun.*
May that heavenly light illuminate our thought flow in our intellect.)

The Vedic gods are basically nature gods. However, from the description of their personalities it seems possible that Indra was a human being who was deified later and so was Vishnu who assisted Indra in his activities and was known as Upendra but later superseded Indra; Vivaswan, father of Vaivaswat Manu also appears to be a real person, all three being progressively included later in the list of Adityas and described as sons of Aditi (daughter of Daksha Prachetas) and rishi Kashyapa. The number of Adityas ultimately reaches 12. Aditi, meaning infinity, herself is a considered to be an imaginary entity.

Seed of the concept of one Supreme Entity may be seen in some Rigveda hymns but it is in Atharvaveda for the first time that an omnipresent god (Varuna) is mentioned (**B-VRC** Ch 7). The concept of one Supreme Entity matured only in the Upanishads.

It is believed that Maharshi Vyasa collected these hymns which were passed on from generation to generation and arranged them into 10 *mandalas*. This is remarkable since in the absence of the art of writing which did not exist even up to the Ramayana times (**Y-R:** Ch VIB p 90) the hymns were preserved without

any change. The events mentioned in Rigveda Samhita were those observed by the composer Rishis and may be considered contemporary and reliable.

5.0 CHRONOLOGY FRAMEWORK

We have mentioned that most Hindu texts ignore or are vague about or mix up chronology and history. We cannot ignore the fact that in the early Vedic times writing was not invented and texts had to be composed and committed to memory and transmitted orally. Even after writing was invented the books had to be copied by hand in the absence of printing technology and errors in copying could be made and propagated in time. Unfortunately the corruption of the texts has gone much farther than just copying errors. We have already reviewed how various authors have added their own texts to the epics and how various priest writers rewrote the Puranas to suit and support their own sects thereby striking at the reliability of information. Analyses of the type made by the earlier mentioned scholars have made it possible to put these texts in a proper historical and chronological perspective.

The dynasty lists in the Puranas give us a means for developing a chronological framework as well as vetting the historical anecdotes in the Puranas by comparing them with events mentioned elsewhere. The names of the kings in the Puranas are confirmed as historcally true from the fact that same names occur in the Rigveda also. The dynasty lists however cannot be relied upon without careful vetting because many of them contain errors. In order to arrive at the dates of personalities in the Dattatreya legends the author himself once tabulated the Solar and Lunar dynasty lists from Bhagwata Purana starting from Vaivaswat Manu. It was a shock to find that this list showed a ridiculous scenario in which Yudhishtira lived *earlier* to Krishna by nearly two centuries and Rama one and half centuries *later* than Krishna. Even though this was glaringly apparent it is surprising that no historian other than Bhargava seems to have investigated this incongruity.

Bhargava (**B-VH** ch 8-10) looked into the reasons for the incongruities in the dynasty lists using information from Vedas and Brahmanas on mutually contemporary events (e.g. marriage of Bindumati, daughter of Shashabindu of the Lunar dynasty with Mandhata of the Solar dynasty). He noted that many descendents identified themselves by their ancestor's name thus creating confusion. Using these and other criteria he removed the chronological inconsistencies and corrected the dynasty lists which, inspite of these corrections leaves many blanks for the names of kings in some lunar dynasty lineages. Even then it is still the most consistent list available.

Bhargava's dynasty lists may be used to create a reference chronological scale taking a time reference of some well-known event and an average period of reign for the kings. The reference chronological event generally used is the time of the Mahabharata war.

5.1 Dating Mahabharata War People have tried to date this war through various approaches. One of them is through an analysis of astronomical events mentioned in the texts but different evaluators have arrived at widely separated dates, e.g. 5561 BC (P. V. Vartak) ; 1424 BC (S. B. Roy); 2449 BC (Prof. Subhash Kak), twelve dates between 2744 BC and 505 BC out which 1478 BC is claimed to fit almost perfectly (Dr. R. N. Iyengar). **We must reject these dates outright** because the input data generally belongs to the corrupted part of the Epic.

Historians have also attempted to date Mahabharata war through dynasty data of kings upto about the second century BC. Mazumdar (See Bibliography) uses the length of reigns of various dynasties given in Vishnu and other Puranas and using an average period of reign as 25 years gets 1389 BC as the date (rounded to 1400 BC). Altekar gives the date as 1400 BC after several genealogical and historical considerations (See **Sharma** in Bibliography). Pargiter gives 950 BC as the date using an average length of reign of 18 years while Yardi gives 1011 $\pm$ 50 BC using an average length as 20 $\pm$ 2 years. (**Y-MB** Ch X). Bhargava deduces **an average reign of 20 years** and concludes that the war could not have occurred much earlier than **1100 BC** (B-RH: Ch 8). He considers that this date agrees well with the data from archaeological excavations at Dwarka (Rao) which as the legend goes was submerged at the time of Krishna's death. **We shall accept this 1100 BC as the reference date.** (Using any other dates listed above merely shifts the

dates in time e.g. by 300 years with MB War date of 1400 BC, not a very serious concern when we consider the span of several millenniums involved.)

Reader should note that the period of reign is not the same as the king's age or lifetime. A king may ascend the throne at any age, from childhood to an old age. E.g. according to Dr Patnaik's Mahabharata Chronology, Yudhishtira ascended the throne when he was 127 years old. (At that time Krishna was 125 years old and Arjuna 2.5 years younger than Yudhishtira. (See Bibliography). This is much different from Vaidya's estimate of 83 years for Krishna and 65 or more years for Arjuna). Taking the period of reign as 25 years will shift Manu's time earlier by five centuries and intermediate times proportionately.

5.2 Dynasty Lists We are now in a position to build the royal chronology taking the year 1100 BC as the MB War date which is the same as that of Yudhishtira's ascension to the throne and 20 years as average period of reign.

Bhargava's corrected dynasty table starts with Vaivaswat Manu as No 1, Ikshwaku and Sudyumna as No 2 etc. (NB: Pururava was Ila's son but was adopted by Sudyumna as permitted by the then prevailing custom. Hence Ila's or Budha's name has not been given)

He has given a similar listing for the rishis belonging to well-known lineages enumerated also with reference to the royal generations. Table given at the end of this part contains names and times of some important kings and rishis relevant to the present topic.

This chronology framework will put many ancient events in proper chronological perspective and be useful when we discuss Dattatreya's life. It will also enable to decide upon the chronological consistency or absurdity of Puranic events.

The table brings out an interesting fact. This is regarding Narada Muni is considered as a Devarshi who was the mind-son of Brahmadeo. He is depicted as a keen devotee of Vishnu and travels in the three worlds with his *veena* uttering the name of Narayana. He is also known as carrier of news, messages and tales from person creating quarrels hich he is said to be fond of triggering. Narad Muni is seen to do this work in all eras right from the creation time to the time of Krishna in the Puranas. But as seen from the table Narada Muni belongs to the Angiras lineage and belongs to the 38th generation after Vaivaswat Manu and therefore Puranic tales involving him can only be myths.

5.3 Some comments about Rama's Date *We note that according to the above listing Rama stands at No 73 and Krishna at No 101. This means that there is a time difference of five and half centuries between the two. According to the dynasty lists compiled from Bhagwat Purana the numbers are No 60 and No 54 respectively. As Bhargava has pointed out this is because of omission of some names in the Solar lineage and in addition mixing up of lineages in the Lunar lists. Thus there was an omission of twelve kings in the Solar list which did not branch out much. Because of the extra confusion in Lunar lists adjustment ranges over forty-six intermediate generations. As seen from his table names of all missing kings are not known and have been left blank.*

There are however two pointers that can create a confusion and on which comments are required. These are as follows:

Pointer 1: Maharshi Vyasa is related to Vasishtha, the royal priest of Dasharatha through the following lineage: Vasishtha > Shakti > Parashara > Vyasa. Vyasa'a mother Satyavati was Shantanu's wife. But since Shantanu married Satyavati in a very late age when Bhishma was already an adult, Shantanu seems to be contemporary of Shakti, indicating that Shantanu belonged to Rama's and also Parashara's generation. Since Yuidhishtira belongs to the third generation from Shantanu there is a difference of 50 years between Yudhishtira and Rama.

Pointer 2: Shatananda son of Gautama was the priest during the marriage of Shri Rama and Sita. His son was Sharbhanga who had twins: Kripa and Kripi. They were fostered by King Shantanu. Kripi married Dronacharya. He and Kripacharya participated in the Mahabharata war on Kaurava side. Thus Shatananda belongs to Dasharatha generation Shanatnu therefore belongs to a generation after Dasharatha i.e. Rama's generation. (Mazumdar p 60).

Regarding pointer 1, according to Bhargava Vyasa was a distant descendent of Parashara and not of the Parashara proper; either Vyasa's father's name was also Parashara or Mahabharata uses the *gotra* name for Vyasa's father (B-VH: Ch 9 p 223).

Regarding pointer 2 also Bhargava states that Shatananda's descendent was Satyadhriti whose descendent was Kripa of Mahabharata fame. Thus the confusion is seen to have been caused by the habit of referring to a rishi by his gotra rather than his personal name (B-VH: Ch 9 p 211). Thus there is no abnormality in the difference of about five and half centuries between Rama and Krishna.

6.0 A COMMENTARY ON THE BIRTH LEGEND

We shall now enumerate the points to be checked regarding the Puranic birth legends of Datttatreya in the light of the works of the authors already enumerated in section 3.1. Without their publications especially of Mr. Yardi and Dr. Bhargava this work would not have been possible at all and the author is very grateful to them.

The following points may be noted in the Purana birth legend:

1. Atri is an ancient and famous rishi;
2. His wife's name is Anasuya and she is a *pativrata;*
3. Narada incites the wives of the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and creates jealousy.
4. Wives who are goddesses in their own right get jealous and angry and instigate their husbands to punish Anasuya;
5. The three gods visit Atri's hermitage just before midday meal time when the rishi would be away and demand food;
6. Anasuya offers traditional welcome to the guests;
7. The guests insist Anasuya serves them food while naked;
8. Anasuya agrees but when she says that "guests are like her babies", legendary power of a *pativrata* is manifested and the guests really turn into babies;
9. The wives of the gods are punished; gods are pleased at Anusuya's bevaviour and offer boons;
10. Atri couple asks for the babies to remain with them which is granted;
11. Babies are named Soma, Datta and Durvasa respectively;
12. The gods and goddesses leave;
13. Soma and Durvasa leave charging Datta with their attributes and Dattatreya becomes Trimurti.

When we consider these points we observe examples of greatness of characters like Atri and Anasuya and of the curious personification of gods and goddesses resorted to in the Puranas.

6.2 Atri and Anasuya Atri is a famous rishi of ancient times. The following passage in Mahabharata, Sambhava Parva Section 66: "O king, it is said that the sons of Atri are numerous. And, being great Rishis, they are all conversant with the Vedas, crowned with ascetic success, and of souls in perfect peace." recognizes the prominence of Atri lineage.

6.2.1 Atri in Rigveda In Rigveda a number of hymns, majority of them included in the fifth *mandala*, are ascribed to the rishis of this lineage. Talageri (Ch 5) lists 37 rishis who have composed the hymns including a female rishi Vishwavara Atreyi.

Bhargava gives the following lineage of Atri family: Atri, Soma, Budha, Gavishtira and Archananas, Syavashva, Andhigu, Manu Savarni, Nabhanedishtha, Bhalandana, Vatsapri, Prabhakara, Samvarana, Gopavana, Bhauma and Isha (B-VA). Of these Budha and Gavishtira are contemporary.

Unfortunately Dattatreya is not one of them, but neither are Soma and Durvasa. Though Soma is frequently mentioned in Rigveda the reference is to Soma the plant and plant juice and not Soma the person or the moon.) Soma's son Budha however is included but then the question is "Is this Soma Dattareya' brother?"

In ancient times many rishis were attached to a particular dynasty of kings. A large number of Rigveda hymns concern the activities of the kings of Puru-Bharata lineage in the Lunar line. However Atris and Kanvas seem to be rather mercenary in their policy and have officiated as priests for and composed the hymns in praise of whichever king (irrespective of his tribal identity) showered them with gifts. These two families were not affiliated to the Bharatas or the Purus in general as were Vasishtas and Vishwamitras, but they were more often associated with non-Purus (Ikswakus, Yadus, Turvasas, Anus), hence Atri is characterized as ***Panchajanya*** (belonging to all the five tribes). Talageri concludes that *both these priestly families were themselves of Puru* origin and originated in the Late Period of the Rigveda, when the predominance of the Bharatas had ended, and the Purus in general had become more cosmopolitan in their attitudes. The most important Atri and Kanva Rishis in the Rigveda are however closely associated with the Purus.

The name Atri in early days, according to Talageri (p 68, See Bibliography) was used to mean the Sun. It is used for Atri the Rishi only later. Many references to Atri in the older Mandalas (VI, VII, II) of Rigveda, also refer to the Sun and not to the Rishi; e.g. verse VII.68.05 praises Ashwins the gods of twilight as follows: "Wonderful, verily, is the wealth that is yours; you have liberated from the cave Atri, who is dear to you, and enjoys your protection.", which implies the sun being rescued from darkness of the night at dawn. Elsewhere (II.8.5) the word Atri is also used as an epithet for Agni (who is literally the earthly representative of the Sun). There are attempts in some hymns in the Mandala V (e.g. hymn 40) where Atri the Sun is deliberately transformed into Atri the Rishi (V.40). In later Mandalas (I, X) the Rishi Atri is fully identified with the mythical Atri. Atris in Mandala V considered themselves to be special priests of the Sun. In Mandala I, hymn 45 the third verse says: "Agni, accomplisher of solemn acts, cognizant of all who are born, hear the invocation of Prashkanva, as you have heard those of Priyamedha, of Atri, of Virupa, of Angiras." All these are rishis; Atri and Angiras are among the Prajapatis and Priyamedha is *Priyavrata* the elder son of Swayambhuva Manu; Virupa is an early descendant of Vaivasvata Manu who is just mentioned as Manu in the Vedas. We thus see that Atri and Angiras were two of the oldest rishis.

6.2.2 Atri in Ramayana The only Atri who had a wife named Anasuya is mentioned in Ramayana. This Atri is a historical person and was Rama's contemporary. On Rishi Bharadwaj's advice Rama, accompanied by Sita and Laxman, had visited Atri Rishi's hermitage near Chitrakut (nesr Banda in UP) and obtained blessings from Rishi Atri and Anasuya. Sita had met Anasuya who had listened with interest to the details of her marriage to Rama, had praised her for her devotion to Shri Rama and blessed her presenting her with her own clothes. Anasuya at this time was very old with wrinkled face. This story is part of the original Valmiki Ramayana (**YR:** Ch I) and hence this Atri and Anasuya are historical persons and not mythical as in the tale in Bhagwat Purana wherein Anasuya is rishi Kardama's daughter married to Atri of the *saptarshis*.

Ramayana does not mention any children born to this Atri. In any case neither Dattatreya nor Soma and Durvasa could have been born to this Atri who lived centuries after Alarka, Sahasrarjuna and Parashurama who are known to be Dattatreya's disciples (see later).

6.2.3 Atri in Mahabharata Atri is highly praised in Mahabharata. The following passage in Sambhava parva Section 66: "O king, it is said that the sons of Atri are numerous. And, being great Rishis, they are all conversant with the Vedas, crowned with ascetic success, and of souls in perfect peace." recognizes the prominence of Atri lineage. Members of Atri lineage have been mentioned in many places. Atri is mentioned as a contemporary of king Prithu from Swayambhuva Manu lineage (Mahabharata, Vana Parva Section 184). He must have lived several centuries before Vaivaswat Manu. But it does not have any relevance to the present context. According to Bhishma, Barhi is named as a son of an Atri but which Atri is not specified. (Shanti Parva Sec 208). This Barhi must be Prachinabarhi a descendent of Prithu and father of the ten Prachetas whose son was the famous Daksha Prachetas (in Pre-Vaivaswat Manu time) the fa-

ther-in-law of Soma. In Shanti Parva Section 234 Vyasa mentions while commenting on the duties of a Brahmin a royal son Indradamana of Atri and another son Sankriti both of whom are praised for their generosity. Section 210 also mentions “the dark-complexioned son of Atri” as an expert in medicine. However none of these references help in reaching at the Atri who was Dattatreya’s father.

6.2.4 Atri in Puranas Atri’s name occurs as one of the seven mind sons of Brahma the creator at the time of creation of the universe. These are the Saptarshis or seven rishis, the other six being Marichi, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulahak, Kratu and Vasishta. Brahma also created three more mind sons, Bhrigu and Narada and Daksha Prajapati. These Rishis were instructed to procreate but refused to do so. Brahmadeo then had to create a couple who were called Swayambhuva Manu and Shatarupa who are said to be the first couple to procreate by conjugal process. This couple had two sons Priyavrata and Uttanpada and three daughters Prasuti, Akuti and Devahuti. (Some Puranas mention only two daughters.). Of these Devahuti married Rishi Kardama. Among their daughters was Anasuya who married Rishi Atri. In another Purana Anasuya is the daughter of Daksha Prajapati and Prasuti. We have already mentioned tis earlier and noted it as one of the Puranic myths.

As can be seen from the dynasty list given later, while the first Atri lived a little before Vaivaswat Manu the first Vasishta belongs to 37th generation after him and Narada belongs to the next i.e. 38th generation. Secondly, if there was no procreation then question arises (though nobody asks it) as to where Rishi Kardama came from. The creation story is therefore largely a myth with some metaphoric element.

The *Saptarshi* group can therefore be considered merely a group of the most learned thinkers of the ancient era presented together as mind sons of Brahma the creator. According Bhargava (**B-VH:** Ch 9) Bhrigu, Angiras, Atri and Kashyapa are the oldest lineages, Kashyapa being a descendant of Marichi.

Bhagwata Purana mentions that Swayambhuva Manu lineage lasted for seven centuries before Vaivaswat Manu but historicity of this dynasty is in question because perpetuation of higher species has always been through conjugal process and Swayambhuva Manu - Shatarupa cannot be the first couple who started this process. They can however be belonging to early Aryan tribes who migrated and settled in a new region which later suffered floods compelling Vaivaswat Manu to immigrate to Indus-Saraswati region. The story of first Atri as the mind son marrying Anasuya therefore must also be a myth.

Atri is mentioned in many Puranic stories. He is said to have discovered the technique of controlling fire and knew about eclipses and about medicines. It has been mentioned that he was imprisoned because he fought for democracy (Dattatreya Dnyanakosha, See bibliography). Vayu Purana mentions that Atri had five sons instead of the three and a daughter. The names of the sons are given as: Satyanetra, Havya, Apomurtti, Shani, and Soma; the daughter’s name is Shruti, who became the wife of Kardama. (*Ref* Vishnu Purana Ch X, footnote No 83.4, Translation by H. H. Wilson [1840]). But these are obviously different Atris who lived in different times.

Out of the members of Atri lineage from Vaivaswat Manu’s time, only his son Soma, Soma’s son Budha who married Manu’s daughter Ila and a rishi named Prabhakara are mentioned in the Puranas. None of the Rigveda Atris have been mentioned. This Purana wrongly claims that all the Atri clans are descended from the ten sons of Prabhakara. Vayu Purana also mentions that Prabhakara had many children, chief among them being Datta, Durvasa and a daughter named Apala. But Bhargava remarks that since this Datta (Dattatreya) was Sahasrarajuna’s contemporary he must be regarded as a descendent and not son of Prabhakara. (**B-VA**: Ch 9 p 217).

6.2.5 Strange story of Anasuya There is an intriguing story in Mahabharata about Anasuya which is contrary to Anasuya’s fame as *Pativrata* in the Dattatreya birth legend. The story (which occurs in Anushasan Parva Ch 14) runs as follows: “Once, Atri’s wife Anasuya, who used to meditate on the Brahman, left her husband. She surrendered to Shiva saying that she would never live under Atri’s shelter and lived without food for 300 years. To propitiate Shiva she used to sleep on *Musals* (rods used for crushing and beating grains). Shiva smiled and said to her, “Oh Wife of Atri, you will beget a son even without your husband by the grace of Rudra and he will be famous and be known by your name that is Aanasuuya.” Who this *Aanusuuya* is has not been stated anywhere but in the footnote No 99 to Anushasan Parva it is indicated

that this child was Durvasa but this is not confirmed elsewhere except that Durvasa was born out of Shiva's boon (see later).

It appears very plausible therefore that the authors of the Puranas used Anasuya's name as Atri's wife in general both in the creation myth by making her daughter of Kardama/Daksha and in Dattatreya birth. It will be seen in the following that in the independent birth legends of both Soma and Durvasa the Atri-Anasuya couple is not involved.

6.3 Birth of Soma Soma, son of Atri, is an important person in history. It is a common practice in the Puranas to identify an astral body with the person after whom it was named, thus creating considerable degree of confusion for historians. The Lunar line of the Aryan kings is named after him because Soma is another name for Chandra or the moon. Soma's son Budha married Ila the daughter of Vaivaswat Manu and their son Pururava, adopted by Ila's brother Sudyumna is considered as the founder of this dynasty in which famous persons like Krishna and the Pandavas were born.

To add to the confusion, Soma is also the name of a plant the juice of which was imbibed and also offered to gods through yajna offerings. In the hymn (X.124) in which the composers are Agni, Varuna and Soma in which the later implies Soma juice. The Mandala IX in large part is devoted to Soma the plant and the juice. There are no hymns attributed to Soma the person in Rigveda but to his son Budha.

That Soma was a real person and not the name of the planet Chandra personified is proved by the two Rigvedic hymns by his son Budha. In one hymn (RV X.101) Budha refers to himself as *Budha Saumya* or Budha son of Soma. In this hymn Budha calls upon people to prepare for ploughing using horses, tending to cattle etc. and prayers to Indra the son of Aditi who would then give them food. Another hymn (RV: V.1) by Budha is co-authored with Gavishtira Atreya. However there are no hymns ascribed to Atri's son Soma though an entire Mandala is devoted to Soma the plant or its juice.The personal name of the Atri who was Soma's father is not mentioned anywhere. Soma is described as born out of Rishi Atri's penance thus making his mother's name irrelevant. This Atri could not have been Dattatreya's father. Also because Dattatreya's disciples, as will be seen from the Chronology, lived several generations after Vaiwaswat Manu while this Atri being Ila's grand-father-in-law must have lived a generation or two earlier than Manu. It is also unlikely that every Atri would have a wife named Anasuya.

Now let us see the description of the birth of this Soma who was Budha's father. This story is given in Puranas and also Harivansha. According to Harivansha Ch 25, Rishi Atri grew desirous of creating progeny and practiced, with his arms raised, the most excellent penance of silence. In due course his person assumed the moon-like lustre which soon spread over the sky and from his eyes tears began to trickle down and flood the ten quarters. The goddesses of the ten directions gladly held it in their womb but could not bear it for long and the embryo fell through their wombs as a bright ball which was Soma (moon). The other Rishis including Bhrigu praised Soma through Vedic hymns. Brahmadeo put Soma in a chariot and moved round the earth twenty-one times. Soma's effulgence spilled on earth and became the medicinal plants to which Soma gives sustenance. Daksha, son of Prachetas Prajapati had twenty-seven daughters whom he gave in marriage to Soma. This legend obviously is a allegorical/mythical description of the birth of moon the planet and not of Soma the person and this birth is related to Atri because Atri was also used for sun in the early Vedic hymns as mentioned earlier (Talageri). But the real Soma the personmust also have been born around this time and it is likely Puranas have somehow linked the two Somas.

Harivansha (Ch 31) mentions another Soma who was the son of Rishi Prabhakara of Atri lineage. King Roudrashwa (Lunar dynasty) had ten sons and ten daughters. However this Prabhakara lived about four centuries after the first Soma and historians believe that this is one of the erroneous linkages made in the Puranas.

The birth of Budha however is connected with Soma the person. This Soma performed a *Rajasuya* yajna in which Atri and other rishis participated. Soma became proud and arrogant. He fell in love with Tara, wife of Brihaspati the priest of the Devas and eloped with her. A war lasting for 30 years ensued in which Shukracharya, the priest of the Daityas and Danavas sided with Soma while Devas sided with their priest Brihaspati who was supported by Rishi Angiras. In the war that ensued Daityas were defeated. Brahma-

deo finally intervened and returned Tara to Brihaspati. However by that time she was pregnant and confessed that the child belonged to Soma. Because Brihaspati prohibited her to deliver the child in his home Tara gave birth to her son in a field. He was an effulgent handsome child and was named Budha (which is also a name for the planet Mercury). Budha fell in love with and married Vaivaswat Manu's daughter Ila (in Harivansha the name is given as Vairaj Manu) as mentioned earlier. From the dynasty lists and the chronology given later it would be noted that these events must have occurred a little prior to 3100 BC.

In conclusion, Soma could not have been Dattatreya's brother, and Anasuya could not have been his mother.

6.4 Birth of Durvasa Durvasa is a well-known rishi in the Puranas and the Epics but his name does not appear in the Vedas. He is shown as a demanding and quick tempered, hard-to-please rishi and prone to curse at slightest displeasure. On the other hand he has given handsome boons to those who patiently rendered service to him. He cursed Indra because of disrespect shown to him, king Ambarisha because the latter, out of compelling circumstances completed his *vrata* before feeding Durvasa, tortured Krishna and Rukmini and for a minor reason cursed Krishna that he would die of a foot injury. On the other hand Kunti was awarded boons of mantras by which she could get sons in spite of Pandu's incapability.

Mahabharata (Anushasan Parva Ch 161) mentions Durvasa as an avatar of Shiva but not as a son of Atri and Anasuya. The story as told by Shri Krishna to Yudhishtira in short is as follows: Tarakasura whom Skanda had killed had three sons. Following a severe penance Brahma had granted them a boon of three indestructible cities which they could move anywhere in space and which only Lord Shiva could destroy and that too when they were in one line. Fortified by this boon the three began to attack Devas from the three cities. Devas prayed to Shiva for destroying the three cities. Shiva used a three pronged arrow in which Vishnu was in the tip, Agni in the blade, Yama in the feathers, Vedas in the bow and Savitri in the string. With this he destroyed the three cities along with the three sons. After destroying the cities the arrow returned to Shiva's lap in the form of a baby boy. When Uma (Parvati) asked who the boy was Shiva did not reply. But now Indra became jealous and tried to kill the boy by his weapon Vajra. The boy locked and immobilized Indra's hand. The gods were confused but did not realize that that boy was the great Shiva himself. Brahma meditated on the real form of the boy and realizing that he is Shiva himself made obeisance to him. The Devas then praised Shiva and then Indra's hand became normal. The boy grew up and was known as Durvasa.

This is the only story available of Durvasa's birth. According to it he is an incarnation of Shiva no doubt but *he is not connected with Atri at all* even though tales of Durvasa's curses range chronologically over two millenniums from about Vaivaswat Manu time (cursing Indra) to Krishna time.

Rishis are supposed to be learned and composed persons who have conquered their anger and desire. Though Puranas narrate tales in which rishis get angry and curse the subjects of their anger these tales are more likely to be a means to explain or justify unusual or unwelcome events like the destruction of the Yadavas by a civil war and the death of Krishna by the arrow of a hunter. It is difficult to understand how Durvasa, with qualities like anger and whimsicality which people on spiritual path are enjoined to avoid, could be called a rishi and how such a person's words could come true. It is likely that Puranas have used his character to explain the unusual events like Pandavas birth etc. It is even possible that he is not a historical person but a convenient character invented by the redactors of the Epics and writers of the Puranas to explain certain strange events mentioned like trhe ones mentioned above. This is not something new for the Puranas, because character of Narada is also used for convenience in many stories. However Rigopolous mentions that Durvasa is closely associated with Shaiva Agamas. (Ref Rigopolous p 14. See the reference for a more detailed discussion).

In conclusion, Durvasa couldnot have been the son of Atri and Anasuya and brother of Dattatreya.

7.0 DATTATREYA IN MAHABHARATA

We have already seen that Dattatreya's name does not occur in Rigveda or in Ramayana. We shall now examine references to Dattatreya in Mahabharata.

The earliest mention of Dattatreya is in Mahabharata. In Anushasan Parva (Book 13) Section 91 (411) it has been mentioned that "In Atri's race was born a Muni of the name of Dattatreya." He was a householder who had a son named Nimi and a grandson named Srimat who had died prematurely. There are references elsewhere where it has been mentioned that he was a warrior to start with but became a yogi and philosopher later.

The same Anushasan Parva in Section 152 mentions that the Haihaya king Kartavirya who ruled from Mahishmati made large gifts of wealth to the Rishi Dattatreya who being pleased asked him to solicit three boons. He king asked for the following boons: (1) He should have thousand arms while he is with his troops but when at home he should have only two hands like everyone else. (2) He should be able to subjugate the whole earth by his prowess. (3) Having acquired the earth righteously, to rule it with attentively. He also asked for a fourth boon by which if he were to go wrong then a righteous person should come forth to set him right. Thus Dattatreya is mentioned as a rishi and Muni. In Shantiparva (Book 12) the story is again mentioned with an addition that a high souled Brahmin whose retreat was burnt by fire at the instant of Kartavirya cursed the latter that Parashurama would cut off his arms.

Thus we see that Dattatreya was not a celibate *sanyasi* but a householder in his early life but must have renounced the world later opting for spiritual life and yoga. Many devotee writers intrigued at Dattatreya being called a householder in Mahabharata claim that the householder Dattatreya was a different person than the Dattatreya who was the son of Atri and Anasuya. But such arguments are meaningless.

The above texts are obviously part of texts added by the redactors (See later) up to 1st century BC and hence until then at least Dattatreya was not considered as a deity. In Puranas he is mentioned as an avatar of Vishnu but it does not mean he is a deity, for there are many avatars of Vishnu, (Kapila and Prithu for example), who are not considered as deities.

8.0 DISCIPLES OF DATTATREYA

Puranas mention six persons as Dattatreya's disciples. These are: Prahlada the son of the Daitya king Hiranyakshipu (about 3100 BC), the Lunar dynasty kings Ayu (3040 BC) and Yadu (2980 BC), King Alarka of Kashi branch (2400 BC), the Haihaya king Sahasrarjuna Kartavirya (2380 BC) and Jamadagni's son Parashurama (2340 BC). The years in bracket are according to the chronology mentioned earlier. There is one more disciple named Sankriti described in *Avadhutopanishad* and *Jaabaaldarshanopanishad* but no details are available about him though there is a rishi named Sankriti contemporary of King Jahnu.

These disciples fall into two groups widely separated in time. The older group consists of Prahlada, Ayu, and Yadu. The latter two lived within about 12 decades after Manu. We may try to find the time of Prahlada from an interpretation of the Vaman avatar story in the Puranas in which Vishnu took the form of a dwarf and begged for three steps worth of land from Bali who used to rule in the Indus Saraswati region at that time.

There is a legend regarding Manu that a fish, said to be an avatar of Vishnu, warned Manu of impending floods and guided him and his people through the floods to a safe place. Where did Manu's community live before the flood? Bhargava (**B-VA**: Ch3 p 58) concludes that "… it is highly probable that the Aryans originally lived in the valleys of the rivers Ghorband and Panjshir to the south of the Hindu Kush range. These rivers are probably the same as Susartu and Rasa of the Rig-Veda." It is possible that floods in this region forced the inhabitants to migrate to drier regions. This story does not seem to be a myth since it is also repeated by the Persian Aryans in Zend Avesta (**B-VA:** p 60) who were at that time part of the Vaivaswat Manu's Aryan group before circumstances compelled them to separate and settle in Persia centuries later.

Mazumdar, while interpreting the Puranic events in terms of history relates this event to the story of Vaman avatar of Vishnu. (See *Early Hindu India – A Dynastic Study by A. Mazumdar p 225*). Vaivaswat Manu and his people had to cross the land where Daityas ruled and interprets with the following interpretation. It was a period during which Daityas had defeated Devas (who were another tribe of Aryans) and were ruling in the Indus region. Due to increasing population Vishnu, an Aditya, prevailed upon Vivaswan, another Aditya to ask the latter's son Vaivaswat to migrate southwards. Vishnu accompanied Vaivaswat

and his people. They had to cross Bali's kingdom on the way. Bali was the grandson of Prahlada and great-grandson of the Daitya king Hiranyakashipu, an enemy of the Devas. Knowing that Bali would not permit them to pass Vishnu visited Bali in the guise of a dwarf Brahmin and asked for some land. Bali who was known for his generosity granted the land. Manu and his people consolidated their position after settleng on that piece of land and one day raided Bali defeating him and sending him to *Patala* or nether land which is today known as Bengal region. Though Mazumdar says that Manu did not migrate because of floods but due to overpopulation, his interpretation of Vaman avatar is interesting and plausible. If Bali was contemporary to Manu then Prahlada must have been ruling two generations earlier and must have been contemporary of Rishi Atri, Soma's father but as we have seen, not Dattatreya's father.

Prahlada's being a disciple of Dattatreya seems to be rooted in a story in Bhagwat Purana (Canto 11, Ch 13) in which there is a mention of Prahlada's meeting of "a *sage who lived like a python* at the bank of the Kaveri river on a ridge of the mountain Sahya, lying on the ground covered by dirt and dust all over his body". On Prahlada's query as to how a person so learned, skilled and intelligent, capable of speaking nicely and remaining equipoised could remain inert for a long time, the sage tells him that ".... an intelligent person must give up the original cause that leads to all the lamentation, illusion, fear, anger, attachment, poverty, toiling and so on of the human being: the desire for prestige and money. He tells that like bees and snakes who are good gurus he has learned desirelessness and to take only that which satisfies his needs and no more." Actually in this tale he is not named as Dattatreya but in some vernacular translations of Bhagwat it is so mentioned.

In Yadu's case also Bhagwat (Canto 11 Ch 7) mentions that he meets an *avadhuta* whom he asked about from where he had acquired the extraordinary intelligence and instead of going after worldly success was wandering fearlessly and though capable, learned, experienced, handsome and eloquent was yet not a doer, were desireless, free from lust and greed and enjoyed inner happiness. The *avadhuta* then replied that by his intelligence he had learnt under tutelage from many spiritual masters and having gained in intelligence from them was now liberated and was wandering about in this world. the *avadhuta* then enumerated these gurus as follows: The earth, the air, the sky, the water, the fire, the moon; the sun, the pigeon, the python, the sea, the moth, the honeybee; the elephant, the honey-thief, the deer, the fish, the prostitute [Pingala], the osprey; the child, the girl, the arrow-maker, the serpent, the spider and the wasp, which were his twenty-four spiritual masters. He then described what he learnt from each. (These teachings will be discussed in a later chapter.)

Note that here also Dattatreya's name has not been mentioned. It is evident that assigning his name to every *avadhuta* is endemic and the result of the imagination of even Saint Eknath and Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati. Another pointer to the mythical nature of Prahlada anecdote is that during Manu's times Aryans had not reached Kaveri river or Sahya mountains but were confined up to the banks of the rivers Saraswati and Drishadwati.

Regarding Ayu, the relevant story given in the book *Datta-mahatmya* by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati mentions that he approached Dattatreya for a son. He got a son who was named Nahusha, but the child was kidnapped by the demon Hundasura because of a prediction that the Nahusha would kill him. The son Nahusha who later killed Hundasura was fostered by Rishi Vasishtha. The problem with the story is that, as can be seen from the chronology in section 5.0 Ayu belongs to fourth generation from Manu while Vasishta belongs to the thirty-seventh, and was a contemporary of king Sudasa famous for the ten-king war. This is typical chronological mix-up by the Puranas. The story thefore is a myth.

There is not much substance in the claim that these three people were disciples of Dattatreya. It is a typical interpolation by the Puranas besides being anachronistic.

What Haihaya king Sahasrarjuna received as service to Dattatreya was a good moral advice and certain boons which unfortunately he did not use wisely. The advice given to Alarka and Parashurama however are on Yoga and spiritual philosophy. These three disciples fall into a narrow time window of 60 years (2400 BC to 2340 BC) and it is very plausible they were all disciples of Dattatreya. We shall discuss the advice given to them in a later section.

9.0 THE AVATARA CONCEPT

We now come to the claim or concept that Dattatreya was an avatar of Vishnu. Now, not all agree with this. In the Nath tradition he is regarded as an avatar of Shiva. Swami Mahendranath (Dadaji) states: "Dattatreya himself was regarded as an avatar of Maheshwara (Shiva), but later was claimed by Vaishnavaites as the avatar of Vishnu. Not such a sectarian claim as it appears, as Hindus regard Shiva and Vishnu as the same or as manifestations of the Absolute taking form". (See Internet article on Swami Mahendranath, Link given in Bibliography)

This brings us to the point: *What makes an avatar?* Ch X Verse 41 of Bhagvad-Gita says: "Whatsoever being there is, endowed with glory, grace and vigour, know that to have sprung from a fragment of my splendour."

Saint Dnyaneshwar calls such a manifestation as an avatar (See Dnyaneshwari (10:306-312)). This is evidently the basis for appropriating the names of many great historical personalities as avatars by the Vaisnavaites. For example, Bhagwat Purana, a late Purana in Vaishnavaite tradition, mentions twenty-four avatars which include beside Rama and Krishna, such great personalities as: Sanatkumar (the mind son of Brahma), Narada (a Divine Rishi and another mind-son of Brahma), Kapila (the founder of the Sankhya philosophy), Rishabha (founder of Jain religion), Maharshi Vyasa, the king Prithu and Balaram (Krishna's elder brother) and the great *avadhuta* Dattatreya. Vishnu being reincarnated is a Vaishnavaite concept that suits his role as sustainer of the universe. This is clearly seen from the dialogue between Narayana and Narada given later.

A disturbing aspect of this list is the inclusion of Buddha who preached against the Vedic religion in the list of avatars of Vishnu. Probably persons who compiled the list might not have considered this aspect. Actually Buddhists do not like Buddha to be designated as an avatar of Vishnu because it downgrades Buddha's position as the Supreme Entity according to Buddhist faith. Jains consider Rishabha as the founder of their religion and put him in the same class. Kalki avatar that is yet to come is evidently a pure fantasy. He is supposed to come riding a horse from the northeast to save mankind from the evil. Why Kalki should come riding a horse and not a flying machine? Is it because people who wrote this a millennium ago did not imagine or expect technological progress? Kalki should really come in a flying machine considering the technological progress. But who knows? Perhaps by the time the avatar takes place the days of technology might be over due to resource depletion and we might return to horses and primitive life.

The Concept of an Avatar The concept of avatar has been explained in the dialogues between Yudhishtira and Bhishma while the latter was lying on the bed of arrows after his defeat. These dialogues are part of the Mokshadharma section of Shantiparva in Mahabharata. Bhishma mentions Narayana as a Great Being who is the Creator of the universe. The explanation is given by Narayana himself to Narada as follows (Sec 337):

He (Narayana) is adorned in sacrifices with offerings of clarified butter and other food dedicated with the aid of Vedic mantras. He has no beginning and no end. He is Unmanifest. He lives in Shweta Dwipa the white island where Narada visits him and being pure and full of devotion is able see Narayana who is not visible to people who are not pure. Narada then praises Narayana (Sec 340) who tells, "I am the Supreme Lord and the Preceptor of the universe. That which thou beholdest of me, O Narada, is only an illusion of mine. I now seem to be endued with the attributes of all created things. Thou art not competent to know me. I have disclosed to thee duly my quadruple form. I am, O Narada, the Doer, I am Cause, and I am Effect. I am the sum-total of all living creatures. All living creatures have their refuge in me. Let not the thought be thine that thou hast seen the Kshetrajna. I pervade all things. O Brahmana, I am the Jiva-Soul of all creatures. When the bodies of all creatures, however, are destroyed, I am not destroyed......... At the end of a thousand Yugas I shall once more withdraw the universe into myself. Having withdrawn all creatures, mobile and immobile into myself, I shall exist all alone with knowledge only for my companion. After the lapse of ages I shall again create the universe, with the aid of that knowledge. That which is my fourth form creates the indestructible Sesha. That Sesha is called by the name of Sankarshana. Sankarshana creates Pradyumna. From Pradyumna I take birth myself as Aniruddha. I create (myself) repeatedly. From Aniruddha springs Brahman. The latter takes birth from Aniruddha's navel."

This is the beginning of the Pancharatra philosophy from which Vaishnavism which claims Narayana, later identified with Vishnu, to be the Supreme Being. It is also the beginning of the path of devotion. (Sankarshana is Balaram's name and Pradyumna, Aniruddha are Krishna's sons; their names seem to have been used symbolically).

Narayana further explains, putting the events in future tense since this dialogue is supposed to have occurred in a very earlier era, that to destroy the evil he would take different forms: a swan, a tortoise, a fish, a boar, man-lion (Narsimha), a dwarf Brahmin Vaman, Bhargava Rama, Dasarathi Rama, Krishna and lastly as Kalki.

Note that Buddha is not mentioned here since in the times of the redactors Suta and Sauti Buddha was despised by the Vedic Hindus. Buddha's name comes as avatar first in Varaha Purana. Harivanshakara does not mention the first three avatars. Thus there is no complete agreement about the ten avatars.

In the original Valmiki Ramayana and Vyasa's Bharata as isolated by Yardi (**Y-MB, Y-R**), Rama and Krishna are not depicted as avatars but as persons. Krishna was not considered as avatar even in Vaishampayana time i.e. about a century after the MB war. But within couple of centuries first Krishna and then Rama began to be called avatars of Vishnu. By Suta and Sauti's time in the fifth century BC many other avatars were added to the list. The redactions made by them to the epics therefore not only mention them as avatars but the stories imply ridiculously that they were aware of it. Varaha Purana is the first Purana to give the list of all the ten avatars (**YR**: Ch2 p 30).

Coming back to the point as to what makes an avatar we are now in a position to realize that gods do not take birth as avatars but avatar is the designation given by people to great persons who have benefitted society through their superior qualities which may be considered as a divine gift. The first three avatars are not human and have been invented to explain important events through a divine intervention. Nobody is a born avatar but achieves that level only through his actions and public recognition. When such a person dies people create legends of supernatural powers about him; myths replace facts and in due time he is regarded as an incarnation of God or some deity i.e. an avatar. ***God does not incarnate as a human being but people assign god-like qualities to a heroic person and call him an avatar*.**

Dr. Radhakrishnan (See Bibliography), the great philosopher and former President of India, says in his introduction to his translation of Bhagavad-Gita that "Krishna is one of the millions of forms through which the Universal Spirit manifests itself. The avatar is the demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity." He implies that in an avatar there is a descent of God into man and for a liberated soul like a saint it is an ascent of man into God.

Avatar is not the same as a reincarnation. Reincarnation is the rebirth of a person in another body and at another time and place *for fulfillment of a person's karmas*. This applies to persons including saints. However the same cannot be said to apply to gods who are not expected to have *karmas*. As seen from the life histories of both Rama and Krishna both had to suffer a lot during their lifetimes showing the fulfillment of their past karmas. If we are to believe Uttarkanda (in spite of it being ficticious) then Rama drowned himself depressed by his having to order Laxman's execution and Krishna died by being shot by an arrow in a depressed state of mind saddened by the decimation of Yadava clan.

<u>Why no modern avatars?</u> Hindus intrinsically believe in the concept of avatar as an incarnation of God. A devout Hindu deeply *believes in the seventh and eighth shlokas of the fourth chaper of Bhagvad-Gita in which Bhagwan promises*

> *"Yada yadahi dharnasya glanirbhavati Bhaarata,*
> *abhyuthanamdharmasya tadatmaanam srijaamyaham (7)*
>
> *Paritranaya sadhunam vinashaya cha dushkritaam,*
> *dharmasansthapanarthaya sambhvami yuge yuge (8)* "
>
> which means (from **Y:BG**)
> Whenever righteousness declines, O descendant of Bharata,

and wickedness flourishes, then I reincarnate myself (7)

For the protection of the good and destruction of the wicked,
and for establishing righteousness, I take birth in every age. (8)

This is a very reassuring promise for the Hindus who are traditionally oblivious of events outside India, which they call Dharmabhumi or the land of righteousness in a typical frog-in-the well attitude. I have never heard any Hindu asking a question: "Where was the promised avatar when the two world wars took place in which not only millions of soldiers but even innocent people died; worse, when millions of Jews who died in Hitlers's torture camps and millions of innocent people tortured and killed in the communist regimes in Russia and China during the mid-twentieth century, did any avatar save them or even try to establish righteousness? The Hitler regime at least recognized religion but the communist regimes do not believe in God and consider religion as a poison for the mind.

Regarding recent past Can we identify any avatars in the recent historical times, say last four centuries? Chatrapati Shivaji the Maratha king who fought the Muslim rulers of Bijapur and the Moghals in Delhi to establish the Hindu kingdom for saving the oppressed Hindus is justifiably called an avatar in view of his courage, bravery, leadership and achievement. More recent of the calamities when the way of righteous living was in peril are the Second World War and the oppressive communist rule under Stalin in the USSR and under Mao Zedung in China. The Second World War was linked to the torture and murder of millions of Jews by Hitler and his Nazi followers. The war was won and Hitler was terminated mainly due to the leadership of Sir Winston Churchill of Great Britain and Mr. Harry Truman the president of USA. The credit for ending the totalitarian communist rule in USSR goes to Mr. Gorbachev. These were great leaders and possession of leadership quality, according to Bhagvadgita (10-41: "Whatever being is glorious, excellent or mighty, know that to have sprung from My splendour.") comes under the category Divine manifestations. Can we say that God worked through these leaders to establish a moral society even granting that ideas of morality in the west are different from those of the Hindus in India? Will Hindus accept an avatar who is basically a western person or would they wait for Vishnu to take avatar only in a Hindu family? Some Hindus of course might claim that this promise of avatar was only for Hindus in India. That would be tragic because we would omit four fifths of the world population, all God's creation, from His grace. And then let us pray that an avatar is born soon who will save us from the raging religious terrorism India had been facing for last half century.

The concept of avatar is well founded among the Vaishnavaites but not so among other sects though it is finding an appeal in a different way. There is a growing trend now-a-days for devotees of prominent saints to call their gurus as avatars of the particular deity whom the saint worshipped. Many saints of Datta-tradition are adored as Dattatreya avatars by their devotees. Some are called avatars of earlier saints e.g. Saint Tukaram is often considered as an avatar of Saint Namdeo and Kabir of Tulsidas. But again these are the designations awarded by people.

10.0 DATING DATTATREYA'S BIRTH

We are now in a position to arrive at a plausible date of Dattatreya's birth in the light of the foregoing discussion.

It is clear by now that:

- Soma and Durvasa are not Dattatreya's brothers.
- Dattatreya is not the son of any Atri rishi but belongs to Atri lineage.
- His mother's name is not known but it is unlikely it was Anasuya.
- He was not a celibate but a householder.
- Dattatreya was guru of Alarka, Sahasrarjuna and Parashurama but not of Prahlada, Ayu and Yadu.

Of these disciples Alarka is the earliest (2400 BC). The time needed to live a householder's life, to renounce it and become an accomplished yogi can easily be some decades and hence one may assume that Dattatreya was born much before Alarka (2400 BC). If we consider this period to be reasonably five

decades then, around 2450 BC appears to be the plausible time when Dattatreya was born. This falls, around the time when Rohidashwa of the Solar dynasty and Tritsu and Divodasa (Kashi branch) of Lunar dynasty ruled. Gopavana Atreya must have been his contemporary but no connection with Dattatreya has been mentioned anywhere.

Now, how accurate is this estimate? It is based on the following assumptions: (i) Mahabharata war was in 1100 BC,(ii) average period of reign 20 years and (iii) Dattatreya was the Guru of Alarka-Sahasrarjuna-Parashurama and not Prahlada-Ayu-Yadu. We can be fairly sure of the latter. But the alternative estimate of 1400 BC as MB war date and an average regnal period of 25 years cannot be completely ignored. But it is possible to verify its validity indirectly.

We have seen that Shiva worship was not prevalent in Rama's time but became so by Pandava time. The Shiva was a deity of the Indus civilization people as is seen from the archaeological findings at Mohenjo-daro/Harappa. It has been suggested that when river Saraswati dried up during the period between 1700 BC to 1300 BC these people from the settlements on the banks of the Saraswati river which had nourished the civilization ca. 3000 BC to 1700 BC migrated to the Vedic Aryan regions eastward, northward and southward carrying their civilization which was assimilated in the Aryan civilization. From the Bhargava Time-line it is seen that Rama lived in about 1680 BC which is near about the beginning of the desiccation period. Emigration must have occurred around and after 1700 BC and completed couple of centuries before the Krishna-Pandava time and by then Shiva, identified with Vedic Rudra, must have been adopted in the Indian pantheon. This is in agreement with the Bhargava chronology. Actually Aryans must have already felt the advent of the Saraswati dessication, for Bhagirath (2120 BC) was the first king to migrate eastwards to Gangetic plain and established his kingdom at Ayodhya.

11.0 DATTATREYA IN LATER LIFE

It is obvious that at some stage Dattatreya renounced the householder's life and became a *sanyasi*. He must have learnt yoga and philosophy under some unknown master after which he must have made many disciples. As we have seen above, there were four devotees: Sankriti, Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama. But this information also comes to us through the Puranas which should therefore be treated carefully. For example, Parashurama mentions in Tripura Rahasya of his meeting Dasharathi Rama who defeated him sending him into depression, one of the reasons why he was seeking Dattatreya. This shows that the story of Parashurama's meeting Dattatreya is a story composed after Suta added it to Ramayana, for it has been shown by Yardi that this story is false.

After the meeting of Dattatreya with Parashurama in 23rd century BC we do not hear any more of his activities and it is reasonable to believe that sometimes after this he must have taken *Samadhi* because he is not one of the seven Chiranjeevas or immortals. (The seven Chiranjeevas by boon are: *Bali, Parashurama, Hanuman, Bibhishan, Vyasa, Kripacharya and Ashwathama*).

11.1 The Tantric connection We next see him connected with the Tantrics. Towards the decline of Buddhism in India many sects and sub-sects formed among Buddhists and Hindus. While Buddhism made great strides in China, Tibet, Ceylon and Far East it was confined to mostly eastern part of India, in and around Bihar. Many kings were supports of Buddhism and many supported the Hindu system. In the Bihar region in spite of Emperor Harshavardhan's support to Buddhism it faced a decline. During the early eighth century A.D. Vajrayana sect of Buddhism appeared in eastern India and gained wider acceptance in Bihar and Bengal. It practiced the ancient Vedic Tantric practices and worship of Mother Goddess. Sub-sects like Sahajayana, Kalachakrayana, and Mantrayana arose out of this new sect. Sahajayana sect gave birth to the Natha sect which belonged to the Hindu religion.

The founder of the Nath sect Matsyendranath became deeply involved with a Tantric sect which was left handed that is it practiced the *Panchmakaras* i.e. use of five "M"s: Mansa (meat), Madira (liquor), Matsya (fish), Mithuna (Sex) and Mudra (posture) in the tantric rites. It was Gorakshanath, the second Nath yogi and disciple of Matsyendranath who, after a great strategy extricated his guru out of the sect and made strict rules about code of conduct including celibacy. Dattatreya is deeply involved with the Nath sect. He had close interactions with both Matsyendranath and Gorakshanath and is said to have initiated another

great Nath named Revannath. The Nath Sampradaya worship ends with obeisance to the Nine Nath yogis (Navnath). In their closing prayer the obeisance is made in the following order: Adinath (Shiva), Dattatreya, Matsyendranath, Gorakshanath, Jalandharnath, Gahininath, Nagnath, Kanifnath, Adbanginath, Charpatinath and Bhartriharinath. Dattareya's position therefore is just after Shiva and before Matsyendranath. (P.N.Joshi: *Nathsampradaya,* Dhere: *Dattasampradayacha itihaas* p 24)

There is a story about Dattatreya (e.g. in Markanda Purana) told under different contexts, which runs like this: Attracted by the effulgent Dattatreya and his yogic prowess several *munis* followed him to gain his grace. Dattatreya, to free himself from them, dived into a lake where he stayed for many years. By doing so, he also hoped to evade an assembly of Munis who remained on the banks of the lake awaiting his return. Dattatreya emerged from the water naked in the company of a beautiful woman. He made love with her, drank liquor, and enjoyed singing and music. In spite of this, the Munis did not abandon him, and Dattatreya, accompanied by his Shakti, continued to engage in these practices and was meditated on by those longing for *moksha*. In some places this act is explained by the allegory of Dattatreya as Purusha with the beautiful woman as Prakriti and their play as that of the Supreme with Maya. However this story also depicts the Panchamakara practices of left handed Tantrism.

Tripura Rahasya is one of the Tantric (*not* left-handed) compositions in which worship of Devi is prescribed. Dattatreya says: "Therefore that Tripura, the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the blessed, the highest, the one consciousness of Shiva, who abides as the Self of self, should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru. The fore-runner of such worship is devotion and praiseworthy earnestness." (Tripura Rahasya Ch II 71-72). This also points to the Tantric backround of Dattatreya but in its purer form.

According to Dhere (*loc cit*) Dattatreya has been passed down to us *via* Tantric traditions which dominated the Buddhists and then adopted in the Hindu religion about 1000 years back. It was Gorakshanath who removed the *left-handed* Tantric traditions using meat, fish, wine, sex etc. from the Nath Sampradaya practices and brought it to the acceptable civil form of today. Shri Dattatreya must have been a very powerful sage existing before this time and sometime over the centuries he was deified to the form of Dattatreya. (R.C. Dhere: loc cit p 42).

11.2 Puranic Dattatreya This was also the time when Puranas were being written in the present form. The writers of the Puranas must have devised the story of Dattatreya's birth as Atri's son and avatar of Vishnu thereby achieving the following goals: Strengthening the concept of Trinity, bringing together the Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites who were ever in conflict with each other and creating a balanced deity acceptable to most sects because Dattatreya caries the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. However his image as a sage, philosopher and a wandering yogi and *avadhuta* mentioned in Mahabharata remained. His image as Trimurti was confirmed by Saint Eknath in his *arati* which mentions him as "Trigunatmaka Traimurti" or Trimurti (Three entities) with three attributes (*Sattva, Raja* and *Tama*). But Trimurti does not imply three heads. This was explicitly stated in the poem by Saint Tukaram which describes him as ***Teen Shire Saha Hata, Taya Maza dandavata*** i.e. "obeisanace to him who has three heads and six arms". Though Dattatreya is depicted both as one headed deity and three headed deity, the latter seems to have gained deeper impact. Whatever his physical attributes are, *there is no doubt that Dattatreya worshipped today is not the historic Dattatreya born in the 25th century BC but the Puranic Dattatreya* who is as an avatar of Vishnu born to rishi Atri and his wife Anasuya along with two more sons Soma and Durvasa who are avatars of Brahma and Shiva respectively, known also as Trimurti that combines the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He is depicted as either an ascetic or *avadhuta* dressed in tigerskin carrying a only *kamandalu* (a gourd water-pot) as sanyasis do, or as his three hesads six arm image accompanied by four dogs representing the four Vedas and a cow representing mother earth. He is mentioned by various names such as Avadhuta, Atrisuta (son of Atri), Anasuyasuta (son of Anasuya) and Trimurti and described as Digambara or the one with only the directions for his clothes i.e. naked as many *avadhutas* are described.

As will be dicussed in the next part this should not affect te devotees of Dattaereya or their devotion because it is the deep mental state of devotion that takes us to the Almighty God in whichever form you

worship Him and are devoted to Him. He will appear to you in the image you worship Him or the way He chooses to appear before you, for all deities and asints arereally His manifestations.

Reader should also note that the kinds of myths we have discussed are present in the ancient literature of all religions which have been in existence before the science revolution occurred.

In the next part we shall discuss whether this historical finding should affect a devotee.

TABLE

IMPORTANT ARYAN KINGS AND RISHIS AFTER VAIVASWAT MANU

MBWAR: 1100BC, average Regnal period = 20 years.

GENERA-TION FROM MANU	**YEAR BC**	**SOLAR KING's NAME**	**LUNAR KING'S NAME**	**CONTEMPORARY RISHI**
1	3100 BC	Vaivaswat Manu	Vaivaswat Manu	Atri (A), Soma (A), Marichi (K), Bhrigu-Atharvan
2	3080	Ikshwaku	Sudyumna	Budha (A), Gavishtira (A), Kashyapa (K), Dadhichi (B);
3	3060		Pururava	Chyavana (B), Kavi (B), Ushanas-Shukra (B); Deval (K)
4	3040		Ayu	
6	3000		Yayati	
7	2980		Puru, Yadu	
16	2800		Haihaya (H)	
17	2780		Raudrashwa (P)	
18	2760	Akrirashwa	Riteyu (P)	Prabhakara (A);
19	2740	Prasenjit	Chitraratha (Y)	Brihaspati (An), Samvarta (An)
20	2720	Yuvanashwa II	Shashabindu (Y)	
21	2700	Mandhata	Dharmanetra (P)	Dirghtamas (An), Bharadwaja (An), Kanva (An)
22		Durgaha	Dushyanta (P)	
23	2660	Girikshit	Bharata (P)	
24	2640	Purukutsa	Vitatha (P) Kunti (H)	Samvarana A)
25	2620	Trasadasyu	Bhavamanyu	Shobhari Kanva (An)
26	2600	**?**	Brihatkshetra	Harita (An);
27	2580	**?**	*Suhotra*	Nara (An), Garga (An);
28	2560	*Sambhuta*	Jahnu (Bh), Kasha (Bh)	Sankriti (An);
35	2420	*Trivrishan*	Kushika	Bhauma (A)

36	2400	Tryaruna	Alarka	Gopavana (A)
37	2380	Satyavrata (Tri-shanku)	Kartavirya Ar-juna (H) Vi-darbha (Y)	Richika (B), Vasishtha I (V), Agastya (Ag);
38	2360	Harishchandra	Kaushika (be-came Vishwa-mitra)	Jamadagni (B), Gritsamada (B), Vishwamitra (Ks), Parvata (An), Narada (An), Shakti (V)
39	2340		Sudasa	Parashurama (B), Parashara (V), Galava (Ks);
40				Vamadeva (An), Upamanyu (V)
46	2200	Sagara		
49				Rahugana (An)
50	2120	Bhagiratha		Gotama-Rahugana (An)
54	2040	Ambarisha		
72	1680	Rama		Vasishtha (name unknown)
98	1160		Shantanu (P)	
100	1120		Dhritarash-tra/Pandu	Vyasa (V)
101	1100	MBWAR	Krishna (Y), Yudhishtir (P)	

Note: letters in brackets next to Rishis show the Gotra: A – Atri, An – Angirasa, Ag- Agastya, B – Bhrigu, K – Kasyapa, Ks- Kaushika, V – Vasishta). Those next to Lunar kings show the branch: P-Puru, H- Haihaya, Y-Yadu.

Regarding the Rishis, note that the first Vasishtha was contemporary to Kartavirya Arjuna, Sudas and Vishwamitra. Vasishta who was Rama's contemporary belonged to the Vasishtha lineage but his name is not known. Shakti and Parashara were respectively the son and the grandson of the first Vasishtha. This Parashara cannot be the father of Maharshi Vyasa. This Parashara may be another rishi of the same lineage and of the same name or his name may be indicative that he was the elder Parashara's descendent. (Bhargava).

BIBLIOGRAHY: See at the end of Part 2.

PART II

SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF DATTATREYA WORSHIP

1.0 A PERSECTIVE OF RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND GOD-WORSHIP

It may be thought that Dattatreya devotees would be unhappy about the findings in the Part I that the Puranic image of Dattatreya is mythical viz. that Dattatreya was not the son of rishi Atri and Anasuya, he was not a celibate but a householder who in later age renounced family life; Soma and Durvasa were not his brothers and he is not really an avatar of Vishnu in the traditional meaning of the word.

However this is unlikely to be so because devotees never bother about historical facts but are tuned to worship deity of their choice in the form they imagine it in their own mind. What they imagine may be the result of various factors like the pictures or images or idols of the deity familiar to them, to the image created by the Puranas and therir own additions to the image.

For example most devotees imagine the appearance of Vishnu as a four-armed deity wearing *Pitambar* (yellow dress) with Sudarshan Chakra, Mace , Conch and a lotus flower in the hands, wearing *vaijayanti-mala* or the victory garland; sometimes he is shown as relaxing on the thousand headed snake Shesha floating on the sea of milk or *khirasagara*. The devotee does not bother about physical incongruencies like having four hands instead of the more easily manouvrable two, or of the thousand heads on a snake, or the absurdity of the existence of a sea of milk that does not get curdled or he does not bother about how Vishnu can take up survival of the universe sitting in that relaxed state. A devotee would rather try to justify the description invoking divine powers if nothing helps. To him this description is real and this is what he worships, period. If he is fortunate enough to get a vision of Vishnu, he will get the vision of this image and nothing else. In a similar way a aShiva devotee may will imagine Shiva dressed in tigerskin with snakes around his neck, moon and river Ganga on his head berause Puranas describe him so and over centuries this image has been fixed in people's minds.

Dattatreya also, though he is often shown as a normal human being in the garb of a sanyasi, the symbolic description of his having three heads is more real to todays devotee influenced by the Dattareya idols and pictures he has been seeing since childhood.

1.01 <u>Devotion is an Intrinsic Emotion</u> Devotion is nothing but pure love and love is blind to any short-comings the rest of the world may observe in the object of love or devotion. The emotion of love is intrinsic and spontaneous. One cannot say "I have decided to love this person" Such an attitude will only make it apparent that there is an ulterior selfish motive in such an utterance. The same applies to devotion. Saying "I am going to be devoted to Vishnu (Shiva or Dattatreya for that matter)." will only make it obvious that you wish to gain something through that devotion. This kind of devotion is what Bhagvad-gita classifies as "Artharthi" or having the motive of gain.

Thus true devotees would not bother whether what they are worshipping is the historical Dattatreya or the Puranic. For him Dattatreya is in the image of the Dattatreya to which he has been tuned to since childhood and that happens to be the in the Puranic image.

In fact, devotion to any particular entity does not require it to be historically or materially real. Many mythical characters are often created and come into traditional worship. Mythical stories of their birth and heroic deeds get born. A glaring case is that of Radha the consort of Krishna who is widely worshipped today in the Vaishnava sects.

1.0.2 <u>About Mythical Radha</u> There is no mention of Radha in Mahabharata or even in Harivansha which is supposed to give details of Krishna's childhood life. Radha has not been mentioned even in a late

Vaishnavaite Purana like Bhagwat Purana which is supposed to be guide fr Vishnu-Krishna worship. Bhargava (**B-RH** Ch 7) mentions that her name occurs only in a portion of Brahmanda Purana and that too an interpolated portion dealing with the adventures of Parashurama. Her name again comes in one of the latest Puranas, the Brahmavaivarta Purana in which she is portrayed as wife of Yashoda's brother Rayana and hence is an elderly aunt and not a paramour. However the same Purana later presents an absurd story as follows: "Once when Nanda goes to forest for grazing the cattle he takes infant Krishna also with him. Heavy rain and thunder start making Krishna cry. Nanda is not able to stop him crying but just then Radha comes there. Nanda is aware that Krishna and Radha are both none other than Vishnu and Laxmi respectively so he hands over Krishna to her. Radha takes Krishna to a nearby charming jewel-studded canopy. Once under the canopy Krishna becomes a handsome youth and reminds Radha that she is his Power or Shakti. As soon as Krishna said this Brahma comes, marries them and returns to his abode. Krishna again becomes a child and Radha returns with him to Vrindavan and hands him over to Yashoda."

Only blind devotion can support this ridiculous story. Radha as portrayed by the devotional tradition is purely mythical. Yardi (**Y-R**: Ch VII p100) states that her name first comes up only in 9th century AD.

I recently came across another fantastic story about Radha in Devi Purana. In the 49th chapter Shiva requests Devi (who is also his wife) to fulfil his request that he should incarnate as female and she as male. Devi agrees and tells that she would incarnate as Krishna and Shiva would incarnate as Radha. Also her other eight aspects will be born as Krishna's eight wives Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati etc. Purana then proceeds to describe briefly the events of Krishna avatar but coloured by Devi as the controlling entity.

However, in spite of the mythical natrure of Radha's character she is now a major deity in the Krishna cult widely worshipped along with Shri Krishna as his consort and has become a symbol of devotional love. Indian poetry abounds in the poets' imaginary descriptions of Radha's play with Krishna. Such love plays form a major theme in festivals like Navaratri and Gokulashtami. This again goes to show that historical reality of a deity is not necessary for a devotee. What matters is the love and devotion for the image he worships.

1.1 ***Puranas and Hindu worship*** Our ideas about Hinduism and Hindu way of life and thinking have been moulded for centuries by the Puranic myths in which people and especially the devotees have believed implicitly in spite of many absurdities. We should really feel indebted to the Puranas which have been the mainstay of the moral and religious education of Hindus in India which for centuries has been illiterate and devoid of literature accessible to the public until recently.

Lord Macaulay's address to British Parliament on 2-2-1835 says: "I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber that I do not think we would ever conquer this country unless we break the very backbone of this nation which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that if all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their selfesteem, theiur native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation."

The British did succeed in this creating a cadre of clerks. The educated class created by the British influenced education created persons who began to take pride in that education looking down upon the traditional Hindu education and Hindu way of life. Classical Hindu education was useless because except for the medical science of Ayurveda the study of Vedas and other religious material had no applications in the new kind of life. Hindu way of life which required an early bath and worship of the family deity and dependence on auspicious times (Muhurtas) became impracticable for the regular routine with fied working hours of the government and commercial offices of the new Indian world. Only openings for those who continued in the classical Hindu education who naturally were mostly Brahmins had to turn to being priests. Others managed to adjust and finally as history shows Brahmins also fell in line for their survival. In time, the newly educated groups came together and formed groups like the well known Brahmo Samaj in Bengal who began to distance themselves from the Hindu way of thinking. Brahmo Samaj movement started in Bengal but their mainstay was Upanishadic teachings. But the Brahmo Samaj divorced from Hinduism was founded in Lahore in 1861 with established doctrines according to which Brahmo Samajists

do not believe in the authority of any scriptures, avatars, polytheism, idol worship, caste restrictions while it was optional to believe in the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth. But they believed in the (nameless) unsearchable Eternal, Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe.

1.2 ***Changing Attitude towards Religion and Spirituality*** Majority of Hindus however continued to remain orthodox in the early stages of the British rule. After people increasingly received western education and received employment in the government offices and in the commercial offices as trade increased, the daily routine of these new class of servants came to be governed by the clock and the western calendar instead of the traditional lunal calendar and the *muhurtas* (auspicious times). The daily routine progressively changed and so did the ideas about food and untouchability except close to home. While in olden days a Hindu did not eat food touched by a non-Hindu or a lower caste Hindu, people began to eat regularly in restaurants out of compulsion or out of slavery to the taste buds. In urban areas untouchability and caste took a back seat exept in the matters of marriage and social relations, though in the rural areas these issues continue to matter even today. In time the entire world changed due to scientific discoveries and technological progress. Boundaries between different classes began to weaken and the world became what is symbolically called now-a-days as flat.

This progress in knowledge affected the attitude of the new generations in two ways. Modern children, though still exposed to stories from Puranas began to disbelieve their very contents which their elders never questioned. In some cases this disbelief extended to other ancient texts too. Todays educated class, especially those having scientific and technical education though have not completely given up religious practices, yet religion does not take as much of their time as used to be in older days.

The modern education included many topics never heard of earlier. People learnt languages, geography, history, modern philosophy, ancient Indian languages, modern European languages and many scholars specialized even in the ancient indian literature and philosophy. Scholars specializing in ancient literature and history progressively subjected ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas and the literature in Sanskrit, Pali and Ardhamagadhi to rigorous analysis using various modern scientific techniques and attempted to determine various issues such as when they were written, whether they were corrupted by spurious authors and the veracity of the events described in them.

The interest in religion has never vanished completely at any time in India. Saints like Saibaba of Shirdi, Swami Samarth of Akkalkot, Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon, and Nityanand Swami of Vajreshwari, Ananadmayi Ma in UP, Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal to name a few more prominent ones appeared on the scene and inspired religious life while they lived and through hundreds of their disciples even after they left their physical bodies. But their teachings differed from the orthodox in two ways. They did not preach *Karmakanda* or idol worship and the rituals advocated by the priest class mainly for money; instead they preferred their devotees and disciples to look for God inside instead of in the idols. They did quote Puranas stories but not for the miracles mentioned in them but for their moral lessons. They preached that service to mankind was a better kind of worship and truly pleases God better than the popular ritualistic worship. They preached against observance of caste and untouchability, (teachings which most people forgot, so deep has been the imprint on Hindu mind). But majority continued with ritualistic religious practices. Most people however have forgotten these teachings one reason being that most people flocked to these great saints not with spiritual aims but using the spiritual powers of these masters for solving their personal materialistic problems and fulfilling their desires like having children, for gaining wealth and success etc. These saints were highly compassionate persons and grnted their grace even though they preferred and welcomed devotees with desire for spiritual goals but the latter type were a minority. Ultimately, devotees of these saints founded institutions in memory of these saints after their Samadhi/death. Thousands of persons desirous of grace from these saints for their materialistic desires flock these institutioins in such numbers that these have become wealthy and turned commercial. Fortunately there still exists a small minority who are really spiritual minded and follow the spiritual teachings of these masters thus keeping the torch of spirituality burning.

In spite of the teachings of the above mentined great saints there are many religious centres like the Akhadas in the north and Maths in the south which are rich and where lot of internal intrigues occur for taking control. The *sadhus* and *sanyasis* belonging to these centres should ideally be egoless but one sees them fighting on issues like who should get the first hounour for taking bath at festivals like Kumbh mela.

After an initial apathy of the modern generation towards religion and religious texts, many more spiritual leaders came on the scene and there was a revival in the interest in religion and spirituality. We may name Ramana Maharshi, Swami Vivekakanda and other disciples of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Paramahansa Yogananda, J. Krishnamurti, Swami Chinmayananada, Sri Sri Ravishankar, Nisargdatta Maharaj, Swami Sivananada (The Divine Life Society), Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Muktananda, Ananadamayi Ma and Amritamndamayi Ma to name a few. Many of these spiritual leaders opened institutions in the west spreading spirituality in those regions which were familiar only with the Christian faith. These saints also did not and do not teach idol worship or worship of traditional Hindu deities but preach attainment of Self-realization through devotion, yoga and meditation. Organizations founded by these people spread true spirituality in various parts of the world including the non-Hindu world; in fact a very large fraction of their disciples are in the western world and practice meditation and yoga for gaining Self-realization. Books published by these saints and some of their scholarly disciples guide aspirants in their spirirual path.

Though spiritual world has changed and progressively more and more people realize the importance of Self-realization, majority of the people in the Hindu society continues to observe idol worship, fasts and religious festivals both at personal and community levels and are happy in the belief that they have done their duty to God in whatever form they worship Him.

1.2.1 <u>A Typical Hindu Routine</u> An average Hindu remembers God at various times during his day. Some remember and pray to God when they wake up in the morning. Many perform at least some sort of worship after their morning bath, generally with flowers, incense sticks and a lamp before a photo or an idol of a deity, praying to God or the deity to shower grace on him and his family, a grace generally for material happiness through wealth, success etc. He visits temples on certain days or when convenient, observes fasts, religious festivals and performs rituals like certain Pujas or reading holy texts for gaining Divine favour. But all this is for material benefits and out of a fear of God's displeasure. Very few do it for the love of God.

1.3 *Practitioners of Religion* Now, whom does he really worship through by these rituals? In rare cases he worships the highest attrtributeless, formless entity the Brahman or *Parameshwar*, but more commonly he worships some deity in an image which may be an idol or a picture. Often it may be the family deity who may be Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman or a form of the mother deity like Amba, Durga or Mahalaxmi. All are depicted with attributes and their own characteristic forms, like Vishnu with four arms, Dattatreya with one or three heads and six arms, Durga with varying number of arms and riding a tiger or lion and killing a demon. Some learned people explain these deities to be the manifested forms of the formless, attributeless Power. But an average person is more interested in external show of devotion spending enormous amounts of energy and money to make this show by performing religious rituals and observing religious festivals in a lavish and noisy manner. These are the external facets of religion which defines the lifestyle peculiar to each sect. These devotees go by the external appearance and attributes of the deities they worship. Such people are not spiritual *sadhaks* but only **practitioners of religion** for whom exhibition of external rituals is more important than devotion.

The materialistic aspects of such worship can be glaringly seen in many temples where the management and the priests advertise the importance of performing various rituals to propitiate their deities to gain their favours. Such rirtuals are a graet source of income both for the priests and the institution. Many deities like Venkateshwara Balaji at Tirupati are believed to be active (*jagrit*). Devotees offer unbelievably large amounts of money or jewelry to these deities. Unfortunately this malaise has reached to the institutions founded in memory of saints like even Saibaba who himself never recommended it.

1.4 *Practitioners of Spirituality* A practitioner of spirituality (an aspirant or *sadhak*) however has a different goal, namely God-realization or Self-realization i.e. to be one with the Highest Principle, or Brah-

man or God by abandoning the I-am-the-body feeling or attitude. This leads to libertation from the birth-death cycles to which all living vreatures are liable. A normal person likes pleasures and abhors pain. He tries to get more and more pleasures that are never satisfied completrely but lead to a desire of more or different kinds of pleasure. These may be pleasures of taste, smell, music, sight or sex, all related to sense organs, all pleasures of the body nurtured by the mind. The desire for this leads a person to be a victim of the six great enemies of man: desire, anger, greed delusion, arrogance and jealousy. A root cause of this is the ego. If the aspirant wishes to make progress towards Self-realization then he has to give up his ego and be desireless of the material pleasures. He also must develop discrimination as regards what is good and what is bad. Then only can his mind turn towards God. Reading of holy books and company of saints can improve and purify his mind.

Many spiritual seekers consider Bhagavad-Gita as a comprehensive guide for their pursuit. Commentaries like *Bhavarthadeepika* (better known as *Dnyaneshwari*) written by Saint Dnyaneshwar in the thirteenth century make a better guide because of the detailed explanations of the Shlokas of the Bhagavad-Gita. Gita proposes four paths for spiritual pursuit: (i) Path of Knowledge in which a person contemplates on the relation between himself, God or Brahman, Universe etc. and through meditation on these topics experiences the Brahman i.e, attains Self-realization. (ii) Path of Action in which a person carries out his religious and social duties sincerely, but without any desire for the fruits of his actions. He offers the fruits to God, thus becoming a non-doer in spite of doing the actions. This attitude negates his Karmas, Therefore, when all karmas are negated, he is not reborn. (iii) Path of Yoga in which the seeker practices Yoga and meditation by which the Kundalini force is activated. This Kundalini force cleans the body and mind and leads to an experience of the Brahman and thus, liberation; and (iv) Path of Devotion (*Bhakti*) in which the seeker becomes devoted to God. His mind becomes free of all thought except of God and thus the seeker becomes one with Him and gets liberated. The seeker may, to start with, be interested in devotion with personal materialistic motives but in the end, devotion overrides all worldly desires

We thus see that not only the goals but the methods of a practitioner of spirituality are very much different from those of a practitioner of religion.

1.5 ***What leads to being a Devotee?*** We have already made the point in Section 1.0 above that devotion or love for a deity has to be intrinsic. It can however be a result of a carry-over of devotion from the previous birth; or it can be by continuous association with each other like the love between the husband and the wife who, though strangers at the time of marriage in the traditional Indian system of arranged marriages, pass through the cycles of happiness and sorrow in life together to develop love and affection for each other; or one develops a deep faith in the deity because it has answered to your prayers in the time of personal crisis; or it can be because under extreme sorrow you ind solace by surrender to the deity. Note that when one speaks of a deity that includes the Guru also.

Regarding the first type there are many saints who show this devotion either to a particular deity or to the Almighty God since childhood or suddenly at certain age. The worship of the family deity to whom you are exposed since childhood and to whom you know your parents appealed is the second type in which the love and devotion is developed by long association.

Gopalbua Kelkar, a devotee and disciple of Shri Swami Samarth is an example of the third type. Gopalbua had a good job in the Railways which he had to leave because of severe chronic abdominal pains. When the pains became unbearable he prayed and made a vow that "If this universe has a God and if He makes my affliction go within eight days then I will not serve anyone other than God anymore." And within eight days his affliction really reduced. Probably these are divine ways of making people come to His inner fold. Once he decided to fulfill his vow he was guided by divine ways towards Swami Samarth. Once he reached Swami Samarth he did not enquire about his antecedents but surrendered to him. (Dhere: Swami Samarth; See Bibliography).

There are many examples in the biographies of saints like Saibaba of Shirdi and Swami Samarth of Akkalkot wherein desperate people who have nowhere to turn to in the time of extreme crisis and grief surrender to the saint and though they are not benefitted materially, they get a great solace and peace of mind. These people end up being devotees.

Devotion is not based on logic or facts but is an emotional issue. It is intrinsic and more like a relation between a child and its mother. A mother loves her ugly child and cares for it as intensely as the mother of a pretty child loves and care for hers. Neither child nor mother bother about whether the other is pretty or wise and so on. A true devotee of Dattatreya would not bother about whether he has one head or three or whether or not he was the son of Rishi Atri and Anasuya, or when and where he was born. He would be interested in the Principle that is Dattatreya, which for him is the ultimate principle Brahman. Dattatreya's image, whether as an idol or a picture is merely a convenient visualization that helps him to anchor his awareness. It is a matter of circumstances that he grew up in the traditional beliefs regarding the legends in the Puranas including the image of a deity presented to him by the Puranas. Devotion to a particular deity, say Dattatreya could be attributed to family traditions but it could also be intrinsic or inborn due to the link in an earlier life or. Or it could be because of difficult circumstances like some calamity or crisis or deep sorrow that he turned to God and that was Dattatreya. When in dire difficulties or suffering from deep sorrow due to personal loss of close relatives or wealth or when in severe physical distress and there is no one to turn to for help or solace, turning to God remains the only alternative. It is believed by some that when god wants you to turn towards Him He creates these crises which leave you no other alternative.

Different people worship God (or a deity) for different reasons and devotion is only one of them. More common are those who practice the worship of their deity as part of his family or social tradition and then come those who worship for getting God's grace to fulfill personal ambitions and needs..

1.6 Devotee types Spiritual matters are however internal. Most important for a spiritual aspirant (*Sadhak*) is to have faith in God, especially the deity he worships. A truly spiritual devotees or *sadhaks* is interested only in the attainment of self-realization. In Bhagvad-Gita / Dnyaneshwari devotees are typed into four classes: *Arta* (distressed), *Jijnasu* (curious), *Artharthi* (desirous of wealth) and *Jnani* (enlightened). (Dnyaneshwari 7:108-109). Majority of the people belong to *Arta* (distressed) and *Artharthi* (desirous of wealth) type. They are not really devotees in pure sense but are seekers of material benefits by pleasing god through special worships or *vratas*. A *Jijnasu* (curious) has chances of becoming a *sadhak* i.e. a spiritual seeker while a *Jnani* (enlightened) has already become one.

There is a big difference between a practitioner of religion and a *sadhak* or aspirant who practices spirituality**.**

1.7 *Spirituality and Religion* So far we have talked of spirituality and religion as separate entities. Now, what is the difference between spirituality and religion? There is a big difference. Spiritual pursuit is aimed towards liberation from birth-death cycles to be achieved through Self-realization. Its activities like disciplining the mind, meditation etc. are internal. Religion involves activities like various worship rituals, performance of *havan* with offerings in fire, reading of holy books, observance of fasts, recitation of mantras, singing *bhajans*, pilgrimages etc. are external activities. Some of these activities, especially reading holy books and reciting Mantras do help to discipline and purify the mind but otherwise they do not lead towards Self-realization. Though they do give an amount of satisfaction of having done some service to God and make the person proud of being religious, in reality all these observances are a service to only the devotee himself because they are done with the intention of pleasing God for his own personal material benefits. They bind the person to rules and traditions of the religion and cannot make even slightest contribution to liberation from the birth-death cycles. Religion is both personal and social. So it binds him to society and makes him participate in group celebrations of religious functions e.g. annual temple festivals or in the present era, public observances of Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Puja. It no doubt makes his position in society secure and also provides him with protection from external intrusions, but even so it continues to bind him to the birth-death cycles.

1.8 Mr. G. K. Pradhan a well-known disciple of Shri Shankar Maharaj has explained in his two novels "Towards the Silver Crests of Himalayas" and "Know Thyself" many aspects of religion and spirituality, through the characters of a Guru patterned after Shri Shankar Maharaj. Three related topics: *Why different religions are founded*, M*eaning of the True Religion* and *Meditation* are summarised below:

Why different religions are founded

Individuals, who may be called avatars, messengers of God etc., attain clarity, knowledge, and truth. In a few cases this understanding dawns upon them accidentally and in many cases it is the result of their sincere search for the truth and the efforts in that direction. In almost all cases the experiences and findings are the same while the methods of approach are different.

The individual methods differ because of circumstances, environment, atmosphere, social set-up and many other factors. What is important therefore is the problem of understanding and not the matter of approach. The teachings and the broad principles advocated by saints are practically the same. Unfortunately, it is their followers who give more importance to the methods and practices thereby masking the main objective and creating confusion. The great men had no idea that their followers would confuse the real issue and give prominence to forms and formalities, practices and methods.

Unfortunately, everyone thinks that only his own religion or creed is correct and the best and tries to establish his own superiority by insisting that it should be followed by all by force or otherwise. This leads to continuous conflicts, small and big.

Meaning of the True Religion

The word religion is loosely used and not well understood. True religion is an internal evolution that completely liberates and frees the mind. It is to be lived and not propagated. It means consciousness and duty including humanity and love for society, country etc.; internally it includes frustrations and tragedies which make one turn to a Guru or God; Personal troubles are due to projection of his mind and ego. Once he understands this he can take steps for liberation from the slavery of the mind.

Principles of religion have been destroyed or misinterpreted and the ignorant are exploited using the fear of miseries and hopes for better life in the future lifetimes rather than the present one. Priests or books do not make a religion.

Meditation

Meditation is a movement in silence, in attention, without any choice or conclusion. It is the action of silence and not of the mind. Attention is clarity. It is not any thought that has its roots in past memories. Meditation or living in the true religious life is the freedom from thought and a movement in the eternal living or in the bliss or ecstasy of truth.

Meditation is not an escape from the world; it is the comprehension of the world and its ways and the ways of our mind, which is self-knowledge. It is freeing of the mind from the known, the detachment from the society and the world and living in it while being totally an outsider. Your real study starts with the study of your own mind. Observation of your thoughts would lead you to the source of the thoughts, the thinker.

This is specifically applicable to the Dattatreya tradition because this tradition is meant to liberate and not to bind. Debates like whether Dattatreya has three heads or one and whether he is son of Atri or not are immaterial because they are external images. What is relevant to a *sadhak* (aspirant) is what that image symbolizes viz., a Divine power which has no attributes which is another way of saying that the three attributes are balanced. Whichever image has been fixed in your mind is the personification of the Brahman of which Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are manifestations.

1.9 Introverts and Extroverts In this connection Yardi (**Y-BG**: p xi) points out that the classification of spiritual paths in the four types mentioned above is not quite arbitrary. It has a psychological basis. In Indian philosophy, in Bhagvad-Gita for example, people are classified according to the predominance of particular attributes Sattva, Raja and Tama in them. Modern psychology (Re: Carl Jung) classifies persons somewhat differently. Man may be classified broadly as *introvert* and *extrovert*. The former can be further classified as *intellectual introvert* and *emotional introvert*. The path of knowledge is suitable to the intellectual introvert, the way of action to the extrovert and the way of devotion to the emotional introvert.

The introvert seeker, through the grace of his Guru, controls the mind through discipline and yoga and gradually gives up desire and ego, until they no longer interfere with the development of the higher consciousness.

In Dattatreya tradition all four paths namely Knowledge (*Jnana*), Yoga, Action (*Karma*) and Devotion (*Bhakti*) are followed according to the inner makeup or nature of a person. Thus the spiritual path for any sadhak is pre-decided even at birth.

1.10 Devotion Needs Depth Barring staunch atheists every human being carries to some degree a devotion to God in his heart. It is due to this devotion and an inner intuitive understanding that there is a Superior Power to which one has to surrender that he utters the words like "Oh my God!" when surprised or "Oh God! Please help me!" when in dire difficulties. An honest person thanks God for good things in life but more often God is blamed for one's misfortunes.

1.11 God helps his Devotees There are legends and stories which one need not doubt about how God helped his devotees in their difficulties ijn response to a devotee's call for help or even without it. People pray to God for this and that but not everybody's prayers are answered. Spiritual masters and saints tell that this happens only when the devotion is deep. Without this depth God does not respond to a devotee's call. A true sadhak prays only for God and Self-realisation through which he experiences Him in the form he imagines and worships Him. God will listen to you only when that call is earnestly made with deep feelings and has good intentions. The form is immaterial.

Devotion is a mental condition. Its depth varies from person to person. Not everybody gets a response from the deity he worships unless his devotion is sincere, desireless and deep. He may get, in wakeful state or when in trance or in dream, a vision of the deity in the form he worships, or he may get signs or omens that the deity has graced him (or is angry with him). A most surprising phenomenon reported by true devotees is that when in extreme crisis the deity comes in human form and mitigates his problems. This is true not only in Hindu religion but in other religions too.

Spiritual literature is replete with anecdotes about how God takes care of a devotee who has completely surrendered to Him even without asking for it. The following true story is given in the biography of the great scholar-writer-researcher-spiritualist Maha-Mahopadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj of Varanasi. (B. P. Sinha See Bibliography). It concerns a Shiva devotee and a yogi-philosopher–saint by name of Swami Shivram Kinkar Yogatrayananda who himself narrated it to M. M. Kaviraj. Swamiji was poor and had no regular means of livelihood nor did he ask for anything from anybody as was his vow. One day while Swamiji (living at that time in a place called Varahanagar), was teaching Vedanta to a spiritual seeker by name Swami Abhedananda, he received an insured envelope containing Rs. 30 (a lot of money in those days of early twentieth century) and a letter. The letter was from a person by name Pramadadas Mitra explaining that "Three days earlier Lord Shiva came in my dream and told me, 'I have not been accepting your food offerings because my devotee Shivaram Kinkar of Varahanagar has been surviving on only Bel leaves.' In the dream itself Lord Shiva gave me your address. Accordingly I am sending you Rs 30." Swamiji further told M.M. Kaviraj that nobody except himself knew that he had remained without food for three days.

Various instances can be found in biographical literature of saints in which the deity they worshipped actually materialized as a human being to help them in the time of their crises. The well known eighteenth century book "Bhaktavijaya" (in Marathi) by Mahipati which gives biographies of many Indian saints like Tulsidas, Kabir, Tukaram, Ramdas, Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo etc. gives many such instances. The book has been translated into English by the Christian missionary late Justin E. Abbott (See Bibliography). Some of the incidents are summarised in the following:

1. Damajipant was an ardent devotee of Vithoba of Pandharpur who was the village official at Mangalvedhe then under Muslim rule. When people were starving during a great draught and the king was indifferent to their sufferings, Damajipant, out of compassion, distributed grains from the Government granary to public. Some people inimical to him complained to the king who demanded that Damajipant pay for the grains or would be imprisoned. At the last minute a per-

son named Vithu who was obviously Vithoba (Krishna) of Pandharpur, came from nowhere and paid the amount.

2. A similar incident is given by P. N. Joshi in the mini-biography of Dasopant in Dattatreya Dnyana-kosha (See Bibliography). Dasopant's father who was a village clerk of Bidar did a similar donation of grains to starving public as a result of which Dasopant was imprisoned and threatened that he would be converted to Islam if the money was not paid within in a month. At the last moment a person telling his name as Datta Padewar, who could not be any other than Dattatreya, came and paid the dues.

3. A third incident mentioned by Mahipati concerns Sena the royal barber. He had the duty to visit the Muslim king every morning for his tonsorial duties of shaving, haircut etc. One day, just as Sena was delayed because he was deeply engrossed in the worship of Krishna. The King was annoyed and sent messengers to Sena's house to call him four times and every time Sena's wife told him that Sena was not at home. However an evil minded person saw this and complained to the king that Sena was at home. King ordered Sena to be arrested. But just at that time Vithoba, realizing that his devotee was going to be in trouble came in the guise of Sena and serviced the king with haircut, oil massage etc. King was surprised at the fragrance of oil he had never experienced before and to see in the reflection in water and the mirror the beautiful form of Krishna. He felt at strange ease at Sena's (Krishna's) touch and even cured his maladies. In a happy mood he gave a lot of gold coins to Krishna in Sena's form. Krishna went to Sena's house and deposited the coins in Sena's bag and vanished. In a happy mood after his bath king ordered Sena to be fetched. Fearing king's wrath Sena hurried to the palace and still more surprised when the king clasped his feet in surrender. It was then that Sena realized that Vithoba had saved him. When this was told to the king he was very sorry that he had troubled a god to serve him and he himself surrendered to Sena and became his disciple.

There are many more stories like this in which Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Ganesh and Devi come to devotee's rescue. Saint Mira survived the cup of poison given to her by her husband; Narasi Mehta from Gujarat being completely surrendered to Krishna did not know the ways of the world and often came in financial and social trouble from which Krishna saved him every time. So was Saint Kabir saved by Rama; Krishna is known to have served in the home Saint Eknath for several years as a servant under the name Shrikhandya. Saint Eknath was also a devotee of Shri Dattatreya and Dattatreya met him and his Guru Janardanswami in the form of a Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir. (For Dattatreya connection with Muslim Sufi sect see p 5 of Vol II)

And these miracles are not confined to the Hindu world. In the Christian lore of the western world also we have the famous story of Bernadette (born Marie-Bernarde Soubirous in 1844 in France) who had the vision of Virgin Mary who showed her the famous healing waters of Lourdes in France.

Consider now the two well-known saints of Maharashtra: Shri Parnerkar Maharaj was a devotee of Ganesha. He used to do his "Sadhana" late at night. Even his wife did not know about it. Once she woke up and peeped into the worship room to find her husband talking to Ganesha. Gondavlekar Maharaj was a devotee of Rama and he reached great spiritual heights. Once he asked a person to touch his head and that person heard the sound of Shri Ram's name coming from it. There is no reason to doubt these stories.

How does a deity materialize to help his devotee? Nobody knows. May be the mental waves generated extreme emotional state of a devotee, or of a person in dire crisis praying ardently for help, makes it possible for the formless to attain a form. Who knows? These matters are beyond material science. In the biography of Maha Mahopadhya Kaviraj mentioned earlier the great Spiritualist-scholar late Sir Vajrendranath Sheel comments on this issue in reply to a question by M-M. Kaviraj. In those days, in the beginning of the British rule, some people, especially those belonging to the Brahmo-samaj who were greatly influenced by the British education, did not believe in Hindu deities. Many considered Shri Krishna not as a historic person but as an imaginary character in the Puranas. In the context of a report that (Maharshi) Aurobindo had a vision of Shri Krishna while in prison, M. M. Kaviraj asked Sir Vajrendranath Sheel whether he believed in Shri Krishna. Sir Vajrendranath though a Brahmosamaj follower did believe in the

historicity of Shri Krishna. Sir Vajrendranath's reply was: "**Whether Shri Krishna was real or not has nothing to do with the vision because it is quite possible that Historic Krishna and Krishna as a principle can exist independent of each other. One would experience according to one's feelings on the subject. Examples of these can be found in all religions including the Christian. Every saint cannot be a liar. The object of your devotion will make It appear according to how you imagine It to be**."

1.12 All paths are equal Scriptures depict each deity with different characteristics or attributes. Shiva is called Bholenath because he is simple minded and becomes easily pleased with even a small service. Devi is a mother and she always helps her devotees in time of crises; so does Ganesh who is a remover of impediments. Vishnu (that includes Rama and Krishna) needs devotee's love and may wait for an extreme stage before his grace is manifested. But these are the interpretations of scriptures and not necessarily real. It is therefore ridiculous to see people fighting among themselves over matters of which deity is higher in status and better or which path is superior.

As M-M Kaviraj has said, "In conclusion, Vedic, non-Vedic, Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, Bouddha, Jain are various paths to knowledge. None among them is superior or inferior to the others; all are equal. One of them may be beneficial to some person and another to another person according to his taste or worth. But even if paths are different they have the same ultimate goal. In the domain of eternal power there are no doubts or misgivings and whatever there may be are like guides. Once they are crossed one attains state of unity with the Ultimate." (Sinha p 327)

It does not matter therefore whether Dattatreya is the son of Atri or whether he is a composite avatar or when and where he was born or when he was deified. It also does not matter whether you try to gain him through regular worship ritual or *japa* or *yajna* or by reading holy texts like Gurucharitra. What matters is the *sadhak's* devotion. He will manifest to you in the image you worship him. The material history and philosophy are things in which only the intellectuals would be interested. Looking from another angle, just as spiritual paths lead towards the universal truth that is the Brahman, history is also a study to arrive at truth and must be respected because it helps to prevent people from getting misguided through imaginary legends. But what a spiritualist needs in mainly faith and devotion. The great saint Saibaba of Shirdi also adds *Saburi* or patience to these. It is with this attitude that a devotee should read these items of historical information and leave it at that. And an intellectual should understand that: "This constant and eternal Soul totally pervades everything. It cannot be understood by reasoning but can be experienced only through meditation. This infinite supreme entity is inaccessible to the mind and is unobtainable through implements or techniques self."((Dnyaneshwari 2:142-143)

While a emotional devotee is not likely to bother about the historical aspects of Dattatreya, for an intellectual devotee it makes the background of the deity clear and instead of burdening himself with the unnecessary attributes assigned to the deity like his appearance, birthday and so on, an inteelectual devotee can with a clean mind devote himself only to the spiritual attributes. While an emotional devotee would ignore the historical aspects to an intellectual devotee the historical aspects make only the Divine attributes of the shine.

2.0 ABOUT LORD DATTATREYA

Lord Dattatreya is a very popular deity in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and South Gujarat. The image in which Lord Dattatreya is worshipped is the image created by the Puranas viz. an avatar of Vishnu born to Atri and Anasuya long with two more sons Soma and Durvasa who are avatars of Brahma and Vishnu respectively. Though originally depicted as an ascetic or *avadhuta* dressed in tigerskin, carrying a only *kamandalu* (a gourd water pot) as *sanyasis* do, his three-in–one personality that combines the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva has led to his depiction as a person with three heads and six arms, accompanied by four dogs representinmg the four Vedas and a cow representing mother earth. He is mentioned by various names such as Avadhuta, Atrisuta (son of atri), Anasuyasuta (son of Anasuya) and Trimurti and described as Digambara or the one with only the directions as his clothes i.e. naked as many *avadhutas* are.

Among the deities worshipped by Hindus Shri Dattatreya is special for many reasons. He is considered more as a wandering sage, yogi and a Guru (master or teacher) rather than a deity. It is usual to hear from the lips of Datta-devotees frequent utterance: "*Gurudeva Datta!*" It means "Hail Dattatreya the Guru who is like a god!"

For devotees he is more a human being than a relatively exalted idol of a deity and therefore more accessible. We have already seen in the Puranic birth legend how Dattatreya came to be designated Trimurti or the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva all in one. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are traditionally assigned *Raja*, *Sattva* and *Tama* attributes respectively and are responsible for creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe respectively. This brings Dattatreya on par with Brahman since he is believed to have these attributes in balance.

Dattatreya as a deity is unique in another sense. While most of the Vedic deities are personifications of nature powers like the sun (Surya), wind (Vayu), rain (Varun), fire (Agni) etc., he is a deity who is born a human being. It is true that Rama and Krishna are also deities who were born humans and were later deified as avatars of Vishnu but while Rama and Krishna were kings and rulers, Dattatreya was a householder with children. Even then he attained such a spiritual heights that he is mentioned as an avatar of Vishnu by some and avatar of Shiva by some others. His devotees therefore treat him not as a deity in the conventional sense of a celestial god but more as a human being.

He is revered and worshipped by a wide variety of sects. Being traditionally considered an avatar of Vishnu with attributes of Shiva as well, both Vaishnavaites and Shaivaites who have been for centuries at loggerheads with each other, worship Dattatreya. He is connected with the Tantric sects also and hence is close to Devi worshippers. His importance closely follows that of Shiva in the Nath sect that considers him as his avatar. In Mahanubhava sect he is considered as the primordial being. He is worshipped even by the Sufi sect of the Muslims. (more about Sufi may be read on the section on Shri Saibaba of Shirdi in Vol III).

2.1 His Appearance The most popular and common appearance of Dattatreya is the one with three heads and six arms as mentioned earlier. It is symbolic of Trimurti or the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively. The middle of the three heads is traditionally that of Vishnu and the one on left is that of Shiva, though in rare cases the middle head is shown as that of Shiva. He is dressed in "Pitambar", the yellow silk dress of Vishnu. The hands hold Vishnu's Chakra and conch and Shiva's trident, *damaru* (small percussion instrument) and *kamandalu* (water pot made of dried gourd). Dattatreya is always shown as accompanied by four dogs supposedly representing the four Vedas and a cow signifying the earth.

But the three headed image of Dattatreya is relatively new. Ancient depiction of Dattatreya, up to at least 1200 BC is one headed. Saint Eknath (1523-1599 AD) who composed the famous Dattatreya Arati "*Trigunatmaka Traimurti Datta Ha Jana*" in Marathi describes Dattatreya as representative of Trimurti but it does not imply a three headed six armed image. He is mentioned as Trimurti by Saraswati Gangadhar also in Gurucharitra written in about 1550 BC. (R.C. Dhere: Dattasampradayacha Itihaas, p 33-40 See Bibliography) but nowhere is he described as having three heads and six arms. It was the prayer by Saint Tukaram in the seventeenth century that mentions him explicitly as having three heads and six arms. The prayer starts as "Teen Shiren Saha Hath, Taya Deva Dandavat" meaning "Prostration before the God with three heads and six arms. This three-head-six-arm image seems to be more popular in the minds of people and in most temples the idol is thus shown.

There are many places where Dattatreya is shown with single head (Ekmukhi Datta). Bhatgaon in Nepal which some think is the birth place of Dattatreya has one headed idol. The idol that was in possession of Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) as well as those he installed elsewhere is one-headed. Kumtha Narayanacharya, a Gaud Sarswat Vaishnavaite has declared in his book *Guruparamparamrita* that worshippers of three headed Dattatreya are anti-God. (Dhere: *loc cit*). The idol at Narayanpur near Pune is also one-headed.

Another popular way he is depicted suits his personality of a wandering yogi in which he is depicted as a *sanyasi* dressed in a deer skin, carrying a *kamandalu* (gourd pot) and a stick.

Sometimes Dattatreya is depicted as a *Digambar* i.e. without clothes, and some of his praises refer to this form. In many places of Dattatreya worship, one can hear the chant: *Digambara, Digambara, Shripadvallabha Digambara,* Shripadvallabha being the name of Shri Dattatreya's first avatar.

The smile on his face is compassionate and catching. The bliss of his *sagun* presence (having form and attributes) is comforting and sweet. But the bliss of his *nirgun* presence (without form and attributes), even the great *sadhaks* who have experienced it, cannot describe in words.

Rigopolous (see Bibliog.) gives an extensive description of the various origins of his popular appearance and its interpretation, however we need not go into the details in this work.

2.2 The Guru Tradition Dattatreya, being considered as a Guru is mentioned as *Dattaguru*, or Dattatreya the master or teacher. Guru worship is an integral part of the Dattatreya tradition. The words "Gurudeva Datta" may be heard at all places of Datta worship or in the company of Datta-devotees.

In this Guru-tradition one's Guru, living or otherwise, is worshipped like a deity and is considered even more powerful than God. Scriptures say: "If God becomes angry then Guru can save you; but if Guru gets angry then even God cannot save you from his anger." However, a True Guru (Sadguru) is like a mother, beyond anger. The feelings of a disciple for his Guru can be seen in the following famous *Shloka*:

Gururbrahma, Gururvishnu,
Gururdevo Maheshwara;
Guru sakshat Parabrahma,
***Tasmai Shri Gurve Namah*,**

Translated, it says: "Guru is Brahma, he is Vishnu and he is also Shiva. Guru is actually the ultimate entity *Brahman*, I bow to such a Guru". This Shloka is from Guru-Gita, a bible for Guru-worship and is a part of Skandapurana.

But remember that the Guru that is thus worshipped is a *satguru* or True guru who must have experienced Self-realization himself and can truly guide his disciples towards Self realization and. Fraudulent gurus who take money and other material gratifications are many and a prospective *sadhak* must guard carefully against falling prey to such persons.

2.2.1 Gurucharitra is considered the most holy book in the Dattatreya tradition. The book gives biographical sketch of Shri Shripadshrivallabh and Shri Narashimha Saraswati. It is written by Saraswati Gangadhar, a descendant of Sayandeo a close householder disciple of Shri Narashimha Saraswati. It is composed in Marathi verse about a hundred years after the latter's Samadhi in 1458 AD). It is has about 9000 verses in 52 chapters. Many devotees read at least some verses daily. For special spiritual gains it is read in a week according to a prescribed schedule requiring the reader to observe purity of behavior during the period. It is surprising to note that though Shri Narasimha Saraswati has been equated to Dattatreya in many places in Gurucharitra worship of Dattatreya is not mentioned anywhere. Worship of Vishnu/Narayana is recommended only in two chapters (39 and 42). Elsewhere only Shiva worship has been described and recommended.

Corrupted versions having 53 chapters are being sold in many bookshops. The "purified" version laboriously prepared by Ramchandra Kamat and published by Keshav Bhikaji Dhavale is recommended. Translations in other languages including English are now available even on the Internet.

2.2.2 Padukas Dattatreya worship is a *Sagun* (with form and attributes) worship. Since he is considered a *guru* it is customary to worship his *padukas*. Guru's feet are the most important object to a disciple. He considers himself fortunate if he can touch the feet of his Guru. Naturally Guru's *padukas* or sandals are the most important object to be revered and worshipped. Just as a child learns at its mother's feet so does a disciple learn at his Guru's feet. Since Dattatreya is a guru, his *padukas* are installed and worshipped in all Dattatreya tradition temples. Idols of Shri Dattatreya are merely complementary. We may compare this with the Shiva worship tradition in which not the idol but the Shivalinga is worshipped as representing the Shiva Principle.

2.3 Important Days The full moon day of the lunar month *Ashadha* (the fourth month) in the Hindu lunar calendar is dedicated to the Guru and is called Guru Purnima. This is the greatest day for a disciple who pours all his reverence at the feet of his Guru even if the latter is not living or is physically away. (Guru Purnima is also called Vyasa Purnima since Maharshi Vyasa was also great guru and writer of books)

Thursday is an important day in Dattatreya a tradition just as Monday is to the devotees of Shiva and Friday to the devotees of Mother Goddess Durga.

Other dates of importance are: Gurudwadashi which falls on the twelfth day of the dark night of the Lunar month Ashwin (two days before Narakchaturdashi during Deepavali) and Dattapurnima which is considered as the birthday of Dattatreya according to the lunar calendar. It falls on the full moon day of the month of Margashirsha which comes in December.

Guru's birthday is also important to his disciples. They celebrate it with devotion and fanfare if he is living and if the birthday is known. For saints who have taken Samadhi, the day of Samadhi is celebrated every year by disciples and devotees of the guru. Guru's padukas are always installed and regularly worshipped at the place of worship. Swami Samarth gave symbolic padukas to selected disciples who were instructed to install and worship them. Receiving padukas thus is considered a sign of guru's grace. This Guru tradition is followed at all places of Dattatreya worship.

2.4 Dattatreya Temples Though Dattatreya is believed to be an avatar of Vishnu, unlike Vishnu temples (or those of his avatars Rama and Krishna) are very simple like the Shiva temples, austere and without bright colours. Shiva temples rarely carry an idol of Shiva. The object that is worshipped is a *Shivalinga* (*lingam*) and not an idol. Similarly, in Dattatreya temples it is the *padukas* that are worshipped; idols of Dattatreya (one headed or three headed) even if installed are secondary.

Temples dedicated to Shri Dattatreya and his avatars are, like the Shiva temples, extremely simple, in conformity with the austerity of a yogi. There are no bright colours or pomp and show unlike the temples devoted to Vishnu and his avatars. Another notable thing is the discipline shown by the devotees. In most Indian temples, devotees scramble and push each other to get *darshan (*to see the idol*)*, every one for himself and with no consideration for others. If there is any queue, it is only because it has been forced by the authorities. By contrast, the devotees visiting Datta temples are much disciplined. They form queues, help other devotees, and are very particular that those who are be meditating or reading are not disturbed. They make their obeisance to such persons to show their respect but very silently.

The offerings in Shiva temples are austere limited mainly to *Bel* leaves and white flowers; and so are the food offerings. In Dattatreya temples also only flowers are offered and the food offerings are also limited.

In contrast Vishnu temples are colourful. The religious practices of the Vaishnavaite tradition, unlike those of the Shaivaites are more ritualistic and tend towards enjoyment of life. The idols of Lord Vishnu (or his avatars) are colourful, dressed in bright colours adorned with ornaments. The offerings made during a worship ritual include a variety of delicacies (known in some parts as *Chappanbhog* or offering of fifty-six kinds of delicacies).

2.5 Oudumber Tree Just as Tulsi is holy to Vaishnavaites and Bel to Shaivaites, in Dattatreya tradition Oudumber tree is considered as holy and greatly revered. Another tree revered in Dattatreya Tradition is *ashwatha* or Peepal tree (*ficus religiosa*).

2.6 Worship of Dattatreya Avatars and Saints Since Dattatreya tradition is a Guru Tradition is customary to worship gurus and prominent saints of the Guru ancestry. Many *sadhaks* worship the Dattatreya *yantra* given above in the belief that they will give better results in his spiritual pursuit.

We shall see in later chapters how the Dattatreya's avatars and his other devotees served people of their times. Their work however did not stop after they passed away. Their compassion and spiritual powers created their own congregation of devotees. After their Samadhi these devotees created establishments or *maths.* These centres have continued the service through the lineage of disciples. The *maths* and their chiefs are a solace to people who pray to the founding saint or avatar for their grace and for help to come

out of their personal difficulties. Many do experience the grace and get relief, otherwise how can their number increase progressively?

Shri Dattatreya Yantra



It is part of Dattatreya tradition to worship these avatars and saints in the same way as they might worship Dattatreya himself. Devotees do not consider worship of Narasimha Saraswati or Swami Samarth as different from worship of Dattatreya. Even though it is well known and experienced by many that Dattatreya appears before devotees and graces them, devotees seem to feel nearer to the avatars who, probably being living persons of more recent past, are emotionally nearer than Dattatreya.

2.7 Some important Mantras Following Mantras are well known among Dattareya devotees.

(i) *Dram* is the basic seed sound of Dattatreya and “Om Dram” is the mantra

(ii) Om Dram Dattareyaya Namah.

(iii) Om Dattareyaya Namah.

(iv) Om Shrim Rhim Clim Dattareyaya Namah.

(v) Digambara Digambara Shripada Vallabha Digambara.

3.0 HIS AVATARS

Four great saints are known as avatars of Shri Dattatreya. They are:

- **Shripad Shrivallabh**, the first avatar born in 1320 A.D. (some say 1350 A.D.) at Pithapur in Andhra Pradesh;
- **Shri Narasimha Saraswati** (1378-1458 A.D.), born at a place called Karanja (Lad Karanja) in Maharashtra;
- **Shri Swami Samarth** of Akkalkot is considered as the third avatar. It is believed that he is the same Shri Narasimha Saraswati who had left Ganagapur to retire in *kardali* forest who reappeared as Swami Samarth three hundred years later in a forest in UP; however according to another version Swami Samarth first appeared as an eight year old boy in the village of Chelikhe-

da about 24 miles from Hastinapur (100 Km north-east of Delhi on the banks of the River Ganga) on the second day of Chaitra month in the year 1149 AD making his avatar even earlier to Shripad Shrivallabh. Such enigmas however are not uncommon among saints.

- **Shri Manik Prabhu** (1817-1865) is the fourth avatar born in the erstwhile Nizam state at a place now in Marathwada region of Maharashtra state.

The first two avatars, Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati lived during the reign of Muslim rulers of the Bahamani dynasty which ruled in Maharashtra-Karnataka-Andhra region. Their task seems to have been to save the orthodox Hindu religion from Muslim tyranny and interference. Shri Narasimha Saraswati is known to have specifically instructed his disciple Sayandeo not to serve Muslims and not allow his sons also to do so in order to avoid danger to his life. Within a century after him some Muslim Sufis became Dattatreya followers, a famous among them being Chand Bodhale.

In contrast, the third avatar Swami Samarth (?-1878 AD) lived just when the British were taking over India. This was the time when Muslims and Hindus were no longer enemies politically; on the other hand they tried to unite themselves to rebel against the British in 1857. Swami Samarth had Muslim disciples and his grace extended to several British persons too who approached him for his grace.

The fourth avatar Shri Manik Prabhu (1817-1865 AD) born in the Muslim state of Hyderabad ruled then by Nizam has the largest number of Muslims among his devotees and disciples. In fact the family of Manik Prabhu and their religious activities seem to have been fully supported by the Muslim rulers. Another peculiarity of Shri Manik Prabhu was that while all other avatars of Shri Dattatreya as well as the saints of Datta-tradition are known for their austerity, Shri Manik Prabhu was known for the royal splendour and luxury of his establishment though Shri Manik Prabhu himself was not attached to these. In fact he always gave away whatever he received in charity. His sect is called *Sakalmat Sampradaya* (loosely translated as the sect of universal thinking). The basic tenets of this sect are that *if we ignore the differences due to time and geographical location, the basic principle of all religions is the same and all have considered attaining God and liberation to be the main aim. The differences do not affect equality and brotherhood.* What we note from this is that the avatars lived and worked in tune with the prevailing environment of their times.

While avatars of Vishnu e.g. Parashurama, Rama and Krishna saved *Dharma* through wars, the avatars of Dattatreya seem to have been timed to save ethe Hindu religion from degradation after Muslim and British conquests. They saved *Dharma* through spiritual guidance and not by punishing the wicked. They have graced hundreds of their disciples and taken them to high spiritual levels; they are still doing so centuries after their leaving the body. The disciples in turn have kept the tradition of this spiritual guidance alive through their spiritual lineage. Some eminent spiritual guides in recent times of this Datta-tradition are: Shri Saibaba of Shirdi, Shri Shankar Maharaj of Pune, Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati and Shri Pant Maharaj Balekundrikar of Belgaon. Shri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon is also indirectly connected with the Dattatreya Tradition.

4. PURPOSE OF DATTATREYA AVATAR

Each avatar is supposed to have occurred with some purpose. Most of the Vishnu avatars are supposed to have been to punish the evil, save the righteous and establish *Dharma*. The orthodox persons state that the main purpose of Dattatreya avatar was to sustain the four-caste system. This of course cannot be true because during the times in which Dattatreya was born and lived were the Vedic times when the the four-caste system was not rigid and was not based on birth but profession. Kshatriyas could live a Brahmin way of life and become rishis and Brahmins could become Kshatriyas. This is how the Vishvamitra and Shatanu's brother Devapi could become rishis while Parashurama, Dronacharya, Kripacharya became warriors. But when the Puranas were written the caste system became rigid and birth based. And this is the time when Puranas created the birth legends of Dattatreya and cast his present image.

Dattatreya himself is known to have given appearance as a Muslim fakir to Samarth Ramdas Swami and to Saint Eknath. Around the time Saint Eknath and his Guru Janardanswami lived some Muslim Sufis had begun to worship Dattatreya. Janardanswami wanted Eknath to meet his own Guru Dattatreya and took

Eknath to a forest where the meeting was to take place. He had warned Eknath that Dattatreya may appear in strange garbs; he should not be frightened and eat whatever is given to him. Dattatreya soon came in the garb of a Muslim warrior all armed and riding a horse. After getting down from the horse he told Janardanswami that he was hungry and must eat immediately. He produced a golden dish with dainty sweets and asked Janardanswami to join him in eating from his plate which he did. Eknath however was watching all this from a distance all frightened. Dattatreya asked Janardanswami who the boy was and called him near. But the frightened Eknath went farther away and soon Dattatreya disappeared. Janardanswami reproached Eknath for not keeping deep faith. He said that it is very difficult to meet and see Dattatreya and when chance came he had wasted it. Eknath however told him that his devotion to Janardanswami as his guru will make Dattatreya appear again. After a few days Janardanswami again took him to the for4st and called Dattatreya who this time appeared as a dressed as Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir. He was accompanied by a woman who was really Maya and the wish-cow (*kamdhenu*) in the form of a female dog. The Malang said he was preparing food for them to eat. He milked the dog and mixed broken pieces of bread in the milk and began to eat it with Janardanswami. This time also he asked who the boy was and called him near giving him some portion of the food. Eknath ran away frightened and threw away the food in disgust since eating from Muslim was not permissible. Dattatreya then disappeared. Janardanswami called Eknath and asked him whether he had eaten the food but Eknath said he had thrown it away. Janardanswami then gave him the betel leaf juice from his own mouth in compensation and left. Before going Dattatreya gave Eknath boon that he will write Bhagwat Purana and Ramayana fn Marathi translated from original Sanskrit and give *kirtans* in praise of God.

However Muslim influence was oppressive and it was difficult for Hindus and especially Brahmins to live their way of life. Many became corrupted by the Muslim way of life partly influenced by greed. Thus it is said Shri Narasimha Saraswati the second avatar of Shri Dattatreya was for the purpose of saving the Hindu way of life which is deeply rooted in the four-caste systm. However we see that Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Manik Prabhu, the third and fourth avatars consistently preached against not only the caste system but even the religious divide as would be seen from their biographies in the next two volumes. But even among the disciples of Swami Samarth persons like Vamanbuva Vamorikar (Badodekar) could not completely give up the orthodoxy. Among Dattatreya devotees there have been extreme orthodox persons like Shrri Vasudevananda Saraswati but there were also saints like Shri Saibaba of Shirdi with Muslim background. Many of the Maths have been founded by non-Brahmin disciples of Shri Swami Samarth. Dattatreya is worshipped by Sufi saints. This clearly tells about the universal nature of Shri Dattatreya rather than a caste-biased nature as the orthodox profess.

5. LITERATURE RELATED DATTATREYA TRADITION

Compared to Shiva, Vishnu and Devi there is relatively less literature otn Dattareya and most of it is in Marathi.

<u>Compositions ascribed to Shri Dattatreya</u>:

The Upamishads *Avadhutopanishad, Jaabaaldarshanopanishad* and the work *Avadhuta Gita* contain Dattatreya Philosphy.

The *Tripura-rahasya* (The Secret of [the Goddess] Tripura) is believed to be an abbreviated version of the original Datta Samhita or Dakshinamurti Samhita traditionally ascribed to Dattatreya. This more lengthy work was summarized by Dattatreya's disciple Paramasura, whose disciple, Sumedha Haritayana, scribed the text. Thus, this text is sometimes referred to as the Haritayana Samhita. The Tripura-rahasya is divided into three parts. The first part, the Mahatmya Khanda or section on the goddess is concerned with the origin, mantra and yantra of the Goddess Tripura, also known as Lalita or Lalita Tripurasundari. The Jnana Khanda or section on knowledge elaborates on the themes of consciousness, manifestation, and liberation. Unfortunately, the last part, Charya Khanda or section on conduct, has been lost and some believe destroyed. (Wikipedia article on Dattatreya, See Bibliography)

In the Tantric tradition, the Tripuropastipaddhati is supposed to have been written by Shri Dattareya. This is mentioned in Tripurarahasya. The summary of tantra in the Parashuramkalpasutram is also supposed to have been written by Shri Dattatreya. (Wikipedia article on Dattatreya, See Bibliography)

Books in Marathi

Shri Guru-charitra written by Shri Saraswati Gangadhar, great-grandson of Sayandeo, one of the close disciples of Shri Narashimha saraswati, the second avatar of Shri Dattatreya. Strangely, though Saraswati Gangadhar's mother tongue was Kannada and though major part of the events described in the book occurred in the Kannada speaking region, this book is in Marathi verse. It is considered as one of the spiritually powerful books of Dattatreya tradition. It is customary to perform ritual reading of Gurucharitra in seven days which is believed to give a spiritual uplift to the reader. It is also read on regular basis by devotees. There are slightly currupted versions available in the market but the one researched and purified by Ramachandra K. Kamat published by K.B. Dhavale is supposed to be the best. English translations of the book are now available. .

Shri Datta Prabodh written by Kaavadibaba (Shri Anantasut Vitthal) in 1860 AD is according to the author written on the instructions of Shri Dattatreya. Besides stories related to Shri Dattttareya (CH 1-35) it also gives stories related to Matsyendranath, Gorakshanath and Kanifnath of the Nath sect He also gives later biographical stories of some Dattatreya devotees like Janardanswami, Eknath and Nimbaraj. In this book childhood days of Dattatreya and his two brothers and their pilgrimage together have been described. Those details are no doubt fantasies created by the love of a devotee.

Datta Mahatmya written by Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Shri Tembe Swami) in Marathi verse. (Another book *Dattapurana* is also wellknown). It presents a dialogue between Deepak (Ref Ch 2 of Gurucharitra) and his Guru Paila (a disciple of Vyasa) and is valuable in that it gives the detailed teachings of Shri Dattatreya to his disciples Sahasrarjuna, Alarka, Ayu, Yadu describing the qualities learnt from the 24 gurus told to the last named Yadu. Vasudevananada Saraswati was a very good astrologer and a Sanskrit scholar. This is reflected in the language of this book. The stories are based on Puranic myths as explained earlier.

Shri Datta Charitrasar written by Shri Vishnu Gopal Natu from Ajgaon, (Sawantwadi) in the Konkan part of Maharashtra. The book is fully devoted to the deity Dattatreya and not to any of his specific incarnations. It also contains the stories of several prominent Datta-devotees. (Wikipedia article on Dattatreya, See Bibliography)

Shri Guruleelamrut written by Vamanbua whose full name was Shri Vamanrao Vaidya (Vamorikar). It is the biography in Marathi verse of Swami Samarth considered to be the third avatar of Shri Dattatreya. It is supposed to be an authentic record of events in the life of Swami Samarth since he appeared in a village in UP. Vamanbua was an orthodox Brahmin, and in spite of Swami Samarth's teaching to the contrary he has extolled observations of the caste system in this book.

Shri Panta Guru Charitra written by Shri Vaman Narahar Kamat also in Marathi verse. Shri Pantmaharaj Balekundrikar from Balekundri (near Belgaum) was a great Datta devotee who has written profusely poems on Datta-devotion. This book gives his biography.

Dattatreya Dnyanakosha by P.N.Joshi is an encyclopaedia of information on Shri Dattatreya.

There are also books from authors of Mahnubhava sect. Three well-known comositions are: Rawalobasa's *Sahyadrivarnat* which is technically the first book in Marathi on Dattatreya.as "Chaturyugi Avatar", Krishnadasa's *Shri Dattavijay* and .Sharangadhar's *Dattatreyabalakrid.*

Books in Gujarathi

Dattabavani Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati had two notable disciples in Gujarath. His samadhi is also in Gujarat. One of discioples Rangavadhut maharaj has written a summary of Gurucharitra in 52 verses called Dattabavani. Many devotees recite this daily. *Shri Datta Upasana* by Jethalal Narayan Trivedi is another book.

There are books in Telgu and other languages however their details are not available to the author.

Informative books: Following books give a lot of collected information of Dattatreya and Dattatreya tradition.

Dattatreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin and Avatara by Antonio Rigopoulos. Pub by State University of New York Iin English) is very exhaustive in exposing the various aspects of Dattatreya tradition which interested readers must read.
Datta Sampradayacha Itihas by Dr. R. C. Dhere, Pub by Padmagandha Prakashan Pune, (2005) (in Marathi) is also very exhaustive.

Shri Gurucharantirtha - Shri Dattatreya Kosha by D.M.Sathe is quite informative but the stories given in it are mostly myths taken from Puranas and similar literature of the type usually written by persons with blind devotion devoid chronological or geographical consistency. It is published by Anand Ashram Charitable Trust, Mumbai.
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PART III: ADVICE TO ANCIENT DISCIPLES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this part we shall discuss the advice supposed to have been given by Shri Dattatreya to his six ancient disciples Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Alarka and Parashuram.

Mahabharata mentions only Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna of the Haihaya lineage as a disciple of Shri Dattatreya. It has no relevance to the main story of the Bharata the original composition of Maharshi Vyasa and therefore no doubt must be an addition made by the redactors Suta, Sauti etc. to the original Bharata text (See Part I-A of this series). Puranas, which are dated later than Mahabharata, mention more Dattatreya disciples: Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Alarka, Samvarta (Sankruti?) and Parashuram.

As mentioned in Part I-A of this series, there is a chronological conflict in the above list of disciples. Prahlada was the son of the Daitya king Hiranyakashipu; Prahlada's time is therefore couple of generations before Vaivaswat Manu (3100 BC). Ayu and Yadu were lunar dynasty kings being of the fourth and the seventh generation respectively from Vaivaswat Manu. Thus these three disciples belong to a time zone nearabout that of Vaivaswat Manu.

In contrast Alarka, Sahasrarjuna and Parashuram stand at 36th, 37th and 39th from Vaivaswat Manu i.e. in the time zone 2400 BC - 2340 BC. (See Chronology in Part I-A). Samvarta also lived around the same time but details about him are not available. He is mentioned in Avadhut Upanishad and Jaabaaldarshan Upanishad. There is no doubt that Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna had recieved boons from Shri Dattatreya. Based on this it was concluded that Dattatreya was the contemporary of these disciples.

When one critically looks at the advice given to the three older "disciples" it would be seen that the advice came from an Avadhuta who the Puranas have taken to be Dattatreya. We shall however discuss this advice since that too is valuable, and had Dattatreya given the advice it could not have been different.

2.0 IN THE CONTEXT OF BHAGAVAD-GITA

Shri Dattatreya's teachings to Alarka are given in some detail in Markanda (Markandeya) Purana. These concern Yoga practice and are substantially the same as what is given in the Yoga Sutras by Pantanjali. This is not surprising since it has also been mentioned elsewhere that Patanjali also obtained the knowledge from Shri Dattatreya. The advice to Parashurama is contained in the book Tripura Rahasya by Rishi Sumedha or Haritayana written comparatively recently.

Many spiritual seekers consider Bhagavad-Gita as a comprehensive guide for their pursuit. Commentaries like *Bhavarthadeepika* (better known as *Dnyaneshwari*) written by Saint Dnyaneshwar in the thirteenth century make a better guide because of the detailed explanations of the Shlokas of the Bhagavad-Gita. Gita proposes four paths for spiritual pursuit: (i) Path of Knowledge in which a person contemplates on the relation between himself, God or Brahman, Universe etc. and through meditation on these topics experiences the Brahman i.e, attains Self-realization. (ii) Path of Action in which a person carries out his religious and social duties sincerely, but without any desire for the fruits of his actions. He offers the fruits to God, thus becoming a non-doer in spite of doing the actions. This attitude negates his *karmas*, Therefore, when all *karmas* are negated, he is not reborn. (iii) Path of Yoga in which the seeker practices Yoga and meditation by which the Kundalini force is activated. This Kundalini force cleans the body and mind and leads to an experience of the Brahman and thus, liberation; and (iv) Path of Devotion (*Bhakti*) in which the seeker becomes devoted to God. His mind becomes free of all thought except of God and thus the seeker becomes one with Him and gets liberated. The seeker may, to start with, be interested in devotion with personal materialistic motives but in the end, devotion overrides all worldly desires.

Shri Dattatreya's teachings primarily deal with the yoga path. The path of actions and the path of devotion are not given importance. *Bhakti* (devotion) is intrinsically implied in this path as a precondition, for the seeker cannot succeed without His grace which can be obtained only through deep devotion. Datta-

treya's teachings do not mention the Path of *Karma*. It is a special feature of Gita that a good virtuous life lived while performing one's duties without bothering about the fruits thereof can also enable one to attain *Moksha*. Dattatreya's teachings do not mention specifically the Path of Knowledge either. Knowledge is synonymous with the experience of the Self. Gita also says the same but mentions the Path of knowledge as a separate path. Though it does not say what the seeker should do, what is implied is reading, contemplation and discussion about the Ultimate (*Brahman*) until one becomes one with It. As would be seen later in the discussion of Tripura Rahasya, mere learning from books is not *knowledge* unless it is also experienced by the aspirant.

While advice to Alarka is primarily on the techniques of Yoga and meditation, the discussions in Tripura Rahasya go deep into the philosophy of Consciousness and the yogic path. Shri Dattatreya's teachings to these two disciples are therefore more relevant to the followers of the Yoga path.

It is not that the devotees of Shri Dattatreya shun the pure *Bhakti* Path. Actually they have deep devotion about Shri Dattatreya as a Guru, Yogi and a person of Knowledge. As mentioned earlier the worship of Dattatreya differs from the worship of other deities in this important aspect. Very few devotees ask for material benefits from Shri Dattatreya. They get them automatically. And it is believed that if any devotee suffers in life that is because Shri Dattatreya wishes him to surrender and come to him so that he gets immersed in the devotional practice. We shall now proceed to discuss first the advice given to the ancient disciples and then the advice to the later disciples.

3.0 ADVICE TO EARLY DISCIPLES

3.1 Advice To Prahlada This episode occurs in the Bhagwat Purana, Canto 7 Ch 13 entitled "The Behavior of a Perfect Person." (Ref http://www.bvml.org/books/SB/07/13.html). In the context of a discourse on the behaviour of different *ashramas* (stages of life) and particularly that of *sanyasa*, Narada Muni described a meeting between Prahlada and a saintly person who had adopted the mode of life of a python (allegorially refering to the symptoms of a *paramahamsa*).

King Prahlada was travelling with his entourage with the intention of studying the nature of saintly persons. He arrived at Sahya Mountain on the bank of the river Kaveri where he came across a great saintly person who was lying on the ground, covered with dirt and dust, but his bright aura showed that he was spiritually very advanced.

Prahlada immediately offered obeisance to the saintly person who was quite stout in appearance. Prahlada was puzzled because though fat he did not seem do any work and spent his time lying down. Prahlada therefore respectfully enquired how he could be so stout since persons of his spiritual advancement generally eat only once in a day.

The saint replied that since bodily pleasures did not make a person happy he had stopped taking part in materialistic activities. Activities like eating, sleeping, sexual enjoyment and protecting themselves from fear cannot be regulated in the case of animals, but for humans these must be regulated. Every action, be it eating or sex must be performed as a duty and not for enjoyment. Since everything is misused by workers who do fruitful work he had retired from all such activities. The real happiness for all living beings is the spiritual happiness. It can be achieved only when one stops all materialistic activities, pleasures from which are only imaginary. Therefore he had ceased from all material activities and was spending his time lying down there. The conditioned soul living within the body identifies itself with the body and forgets its self-interest. Because the body is material, his natural tendency is to be attracted by the diversions of the material world. Thus the living entity suffers the miseries of material existence.

The living entity covered by the material body does not see the happiness within himself but runs after happiness in the material world. He tries to rid himself of the causes of distress but since material nature controls him he is ultimately baffled.

Materialistic activities are always mixed with three kinds of miserable conditions--*adhyatmika (spiritual)*, *adhidaivika (of destiny)* and *adhibhautika (material)*. Therefore, even if one achieves some success by performing such activities one is still subjected to birth, death, old age, disease and the results of the

fruits of his activities. For example, a rich man, who is a victim of slavery to his senses, is very greedy to accumulate wealth and therefore suffers from insomnia due to fear from all sides, despite his wealth and opulence.

Those who are considered materially powerful and rich are always full of anxieties because of governmental laws, thieves and rogues, enemies, family members, animals, birds, persons seeking charity, the inevitable time factor and even their own selves. Thus they are invariably afraid. Therefore persons of intelligence should give up the original cause of lamentation, illusion, fear, anger, attachment, poverty and unnecessary labour. The original cause of all of these is the desire for unnecessary prestige and money.

He said, “The bee and the python are two excellent spiritual masters who give us exemplary instructions regarding how to be satisfied by collecting only a little and how to stay in one place instead of moving about. From the bumblebee I have learned to be unattached to accumulating money, for although money is as good as honey, anyone can kill its owner and take it away. I do not endeavour to get anything, but am satisfied with whatever is achieved in its own way. If I do not get anything, I am patient and unagitated like a python and lie down in this way for many days. Sometimes I eat a very small quantity and sometimes a great quantity. Sometimes the food is very palatable, and sometimes it is stale. Sometimes *prasada* is offered with great respect, and sometimes food is given neglectfully. Sometimes I eat during the day and sometimes at night. Thus I eat what is easily available. To cover my body I use whatever is available, whether it be linen, silk, cotton, bark or deerskin, according to my destiny, and I am fully satisfied and unagitated. Sometimes I lie on the surface of the earth, sometimes on leaves, grass or stone, sometimes on a pile of ashes, or sometimes, by the will of others, in a palace on a first-class bed with pillows. Sometimes I bathe myself very nicely, smear sandalwood paste all over my body, put on a flower garland, and dress in fine garments and ornaments. Then I travel like a king on the back of an elephant or on a chariot or horse. Sometimes, however, I travel naked, like a person haunted by a ghost. Different people are of different mentalities. Therefore it is not my business either to praise them or to blaspheme them. I only desire their welfare, hoping that they will agree to become one with the Supersoul (*Paramatman*). The mental concoction of discrimination between good and bad should be accepted as one unit and then invested in the mind, which should then be invested in the false ego. The false ego should be invested in the total material energy. This is the process of fighting false discrimination. A learned, thoughtful person must realize that material existence is illusion. This is possible only by Self-realization. A Self-realized person, who has actually realized the truth, should retire from all material activities, living ia a state of Self-realization.”

He said, “Prahlada Maharaj, you are certainly a Self-realized soul and a devotee of the Supreme Lord. You do not care for public opinion or the so-called scriptures. For this reason I have described to you without hesitation the history of my self-realization.”

After Prahlada Maharaj heard these instructions from the saint, he understood the occupational duties of a perfect person (*paramahamsa*). Thus he duly worshiped the saint, took his permission and then left for his own home.

Note that since Aryans had not gone beyond River Saraswati in Prahlada’s time they could not have reached River Kaveri which is too far to the south. The story is, as mentioned earlier in Part I, is a myth.

The advice given by the Avadhuta (who is confused with Shri Dattatreya in some Puranas) to King Prahlada is lucid and requires no comment. It is basically the same as the lessons from Ishavasyopnishad which Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi taught to Dasganu through the maidservant of Kakasaheb Dikshit of Vileparle Mumbai. (See Part VII-3)

3.2 Advice To Ayu King Ayu had approached Shri Dattatreya for a son on the advice of the royal priest. Ayu went in search of Shri Dattatreya and finally found him on Sahya Mountain. To avoid Ayu Dattatreya called Maya (Shakti) in the form of a beautiful maiden and indulged in amorous activities with her. However Ayu who was a spiritually elevated person realized that this was all a drama and the woman was really Maya with whom the Adi Purusha Dattatreya was playing. He embraced Dattatreya's feet who warned and told him that he (i.e. Dattatreya) was an impure person and Ayu should leave immediately. When Ayu

did not leave Dattatreya demanded human flesh in a skull every day. Ayu agreed. Pleased with Ayu, Datt-tatreya offered him a boon. Ayu asked for a son which Dattatreya agreed and sent him away with a fruit to be consumed by his queen Indumati.

In due course the queen Indumati gave birth to a son. But the demon Hundasur, who knew of the prediction that this child would be the cause of his death, came in the form of a maidservant and kidnapped him. He gave the child to his queen for killing but she took a liking for the child and secretly sent him to Rishi Vasishta. The child, now named Nahusha grew up with Vasishta and when he grew up killed Hundasura thus fulfilling the prediction. Vasishta returned Nahusha to king Ayu. Thus we see that King Ayu was not a disciple in the generally understood meaning of the term.

There are also many chronological and geographical inconsistencies in the story. The concept of Brahman and Maya, or Purusha and Prakriti was developed many centuries after Ayu. Ayu ruled from Sapta Sindhu region. Aryans had not yet reached Matapur (Mahur) which is one of the places claimed to be the birthplace of Dattatreya and is located in Nanded district of Maharashtra State where Aryans reached only many centuries later. Also even the first rishi Vasishtha lived many centuries later than Ayu. This story therefore is one of the typical Puranic myths. (This story is mentioned from Dattamahatmya by Shri Vasudevananada Saraswati.)

3.3 Advice To Yadu King Yadu was the son of Yayati and grandson of Ayu. Yayati had two wives: Devayani and Sharmishtha. Devayani was the daughter of Ushanas Shukracharya (a Bhrigu) who was the Guru of tye Danavas. She gave birth to two sons: Yadu and Turvasu. Sharmishtha was the daughter of a Danava king Vrishparva and was the mother of three sons: Puru, Druhyu and Anu. Yayati became prematurely old due to Shukracharya's curse but had an option to pass the aging to one of his sons. None except Puru agreed to it. Yayati named Puru as his successor, sending the other four sons with smaller kingdoms near the outskirts of his kingdom. Thus Puru was the ancestor of Pandavas and Kauravas who are, in a way, descendants of the Danava Vrishaparva through Sharmishtha while Shri Krishna, a descendent of Yadu, has Bhrigu blood in him.

King Yayati's kingdom must have been adjoining that of Vrishaparva because Yayati is said to have met both Devayani and Sharmishtha while on hunting trips which must have been in the forest separating the two kingdoms. Vrishaparva and Shukracharya appear to have come from Gujarat, since their priests the Bhrigus were descendants of Varuna, God of the sea, and have always been associated with this region of India (Original name of Bharuch near Baroda was Bhrigu kaccha). Their territory bordered on that of Yayati who was a follower of the Angirasas.

According to the Bhagwat Purana, (Canto 9 Ch 19) Druhyu ruled over the southeastern direction, Yadu over the southern side, Turvasu over the western part and Anu over the north. Over the years, the Yadu clans inherited the territories to the south-west of the Gangetic plains, between the Chambal River, Betwa and Ken, which correspond to the border areas of the present Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

King Yadu, observing a young Brahmin mendicant wandering around fearlessly, asked him why when everyone else was striving hard for wealth, health, success, knowledge, spiritual gains etc. he was moving about like a child even though he appeared to be capable, learned, experienced, handsome and eloquent instead of doing any work. He requested the Brahmin the cause of the inner happiness in spite of his being all alone.

The Brahmin replied that he had learnt this art from many spiritual masters who were 24 in number. These were: earth, air, sky, water, fire, moon; sun, pigeon, python, sea, moth, honeybee; elephant, the honeythief, deer, fish, a prostitute (Pingala), a raven; a child, a maiden, the arrow-maker, serpent, spider and wasp. He then explained what he learnt from each which is summarised below:

1. **Earth**: I learnt patience and doing good to others.

2. **Water**: I learnt the quality of purity.

3. **Air**: I learnt to be without attachment though moving among people.

4. **Fire**: I learnt to glow with the splendour of Self-knowledge and austerity.

5. **Sky**: I learnt that the Self is all-pervading and yet without contact with any object.

6. **Moon**: I learnt changes belong to the material body but not to the Self which is is always perfect.

7. **Sun**: I learnt that like Sun reflected in many pots of water appears to be many, so also Brahman appears different in different bodies caused by the reflection through the mind.

8. **Pigeon**: Once I saw mother pigeon rushing into a hunter's net out of attachment to her children who were already in the net. From this I have learnt that attachment is the root cause of earthly bondage.

9. **Python**: who eats only what comes to it without going out in search of food; I learnt from him to be content with whatever I get to eat.

10. **Ocean**: who remains unmoved, even though hundreds of rivers flow into it, so also a wise man should remain unmoved among all the various sorts of temptations, difficulties and troubles.

11. **Moth**: I learnt to control the sense of sight and to fix the mind on the Self.

12. **Honey-Bee**: which gathers honey from various flowers I learnt to beg for alms from many houses so that I am not a burden to any single householder.

13. **Honey-gatherer**: A honey-gathereer easily takes away all the honey stored by a bee after hard work. From this I learnt that it is useless to hoard things.

14. **Elephant**: I learnt that one should destroy lust otherwise, blinded by lust even at the sight of a female elephant, one falls into a grass-covered pit trap.

15. **Deer**: The deer is enticed and trapped by the hunter through its love of music. Therefore, one should never be distracted by sense pleasures which can distract a seeker from his spiritual path.

16. **Fish**: From the fish who is easily caught by the bait of food I learnt not to be greedy for food lest I get ruined by losing my independence.

17. **Pingala the prostitute**: I noticed that a prostitute by name Pingala who became hopeless after vainly waiting for customers, made herself feel satisfied with whatever she had earned that day and retired to a sound sleep. I learnt from this fallen woman the lesson that the *abandonment of hope* leads to contentment.

18. **Raven**: A raven that had picked up a piece of flesh was pursued and beaten by other birds. It dropped the piece of flesh and attained peace and rest. From this I learnt that a man in the world undergoes all sorts of troubles and miseries when he runs after sensual pleasures and that he becomes as happy as the bird when he abandons them.

19. **Child**: I learnt the virtue of cheerfulness from the child who who sucks his milk free from all cares, worries and anxieties, and is always cheerful.

20. **Maiden**: The maiden was husking paddy. Her bangles made much noise which attracted attention of visitors from the house. To silence the bangles, she removed the bangles one by one. Even when just two bangles were left, they produced some noise. When she removed one and only one remained, it did not make any noise and she was happy. I learnt from the maiden that living among many would create discord, disturbance, dispute and quarrel. Even among two there might be unnecessary words or strife. The ascetic or the *Sanyasi* should remain alone in solitude.

21. **Serpent**: A serpent does not build its own hole. It dwells in the holes dug out by others. Similarly, an ascetic should not build a home for himself. He should live in a temple or a cave built by others.

22. **Arrow-maker**: I learnt from the arrow-maker the quality of intense concentration of mind.

23. **Spider**: The spider weaves long threads taken out of his mouth into cobwebs and then gets itself entangled in the net of its own making. Similarly, man makes a net of his own ideas and gets entangled in it. The wise man should, therefore abandon all worldly thoughts and think of Brahman only.

24. **Beetle**: The beetle catches hold of a worm, puts it in its nest and gives it a sting. The poor worm, always fearing the return of the beetle and sting and thinking constantly of the beetle, itself becomes a beetle. I learnt from the beetle and the worm to turn myself into the Self by contemplating constantly on It (Brahman); thus I gave up all attachment to the body and attained liberation.

This story of Yadu meeting an Avadhuta is given in Bhagwat Purana Canto 11. It starts at verse 24 of Ch 7 and goes upto the end of Ch 9. At the end of Ch 9 it has been mentioned based on the verse 4 in Ch 7 of Canto 2 that the avadhuta was Dattatreya.

The king Yadu was highly impressed by listening to these enlightening words of Lord Dattatreya and practised constant meditation on the Self.

4.0 ADVICE TO KARTAVIRYA SAHASRARJUNA

Now we shall discuss the advice given by Shri Dattatreya to Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parshurama. We shall start with the Haihaya king Kartavirya Arjuna also known as Sahasrarjuna.

Arjuna was the son of Kritavirya of Haihaya lineage in the Yadu line of the Lunar branch. He was Alarka's contemporary. He was a powerful king ruling from Mahishmati (Mahabharata: Anushasan Parva Ch 151-156). It is now known as Maheshwar; it is a town in Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh state in central India, on the north bank of the Narmada River. The following is based upon the account in Mahabharata.

Once Shri Dattatreya (He is mentioned as Rishi Dattatreya here) visited Kartavirya Arjuna. To welcome sages being the *dharma* of Kshatriyas he humbly offered all his wealth at his feet. Dattatreya was pleased and instructed him to ask for three boons for anything he wanted. Kartavirya asked for the following three boons: (i) “During war I should have one thousand arms and the warriors should see these thousand arms, (ii) during normal life only the usual two hands should be seen. (iii) I should conquer all earth by my bravery and should rule it carefully and righteously.” He also requested for a fourth boon: When I deviate from the righteous path I who am blessed by you, should be guided by saints. Dattatreya said “So be it!” and left. Because of these boons he was known as Sahasrarjuna.

Markandeya Purana gives a slightly different story. After king Kritavirya’s death, his ministers and priests decided to crown his son Kartavirya Arjuna as their new king. But Kartavirya insisted that he would not become the king unless and until he had attained the status of a yogi. Sage Garga then advised Arjuna to worship Dattatreya who had helped the deities to reunite after they had defeated the demons. Arjuna then went to Dattatreya's hermitage and began to worship and serve him. Pleased by his penance and service, Dattatreya asked Arjuna to seek a boon. Kartavirya asked for such a power as would enable him to perform his duties as a king in a just manner; that nobody should match him in war and that he should have one thousand arms. Also that he should get killed only by such a person who is more virtuous than himself, that he should guide the people towards the right path and may his devotion for him (Shri Dattatreya) be eternal. Dattatreya agreed and then crowned Kartavirya Arjuna (who now began to be known also Sahasrarjuna) as the king. He also received certain *siddhis* from Shri Dattatreya.

The power he had gained from the boons made Sahasrarjuna proud. Soon after becoming the king, Sahasrarjuna ordered that nobody in his kingdom should wield a weapon except him. He boasted that nobody could equal him. Just then there was a divine utterance that “You do not know the power of Brahmins who are superior to you. When a *Kshatriya* protects his people he does it with the help of Brahmins”. But Sahasrarjuna said that a Brahmin was in no way superior to him who was a *Kshatriya*. Brahmins live by teaching and priesthood under the protection of Kshatriyas. He also said that he would see to it that these proud Brahmins are kept under control and made a living by begging. However when Vayu warned him against this behaviour, he promised to treat Brahmins properly and protect them.

Sahasrarjuna started enjoying life. One day when he had gone for hunting he came across the *ashrama* of Rishi Jamadagni who welcomed the king and treated him and his army well. Sahasrarjuna noted that rea-

lized Jamadagni could do all this on the strength of the Kamadhenu (wish-cow) who provided whatever the Rishi wished. He developed a strong desire to possess this cow and took the cow forcibly to Mahishmati with the help of his men. When Jamadagni's son Parashurama came to know of this atrocity he picked up his Parashu (axe) and went after Sahasrarjuna. After defeating his army single handedly with his Parashu he killed Sahasrarjuna chopping all his hands and head. His sons fled. Parashurama then brought the Kamadhenu to Jamadagni and told him what he had done.

Jamadagni however reproached Parashurama and told him that he had committed a sin of killing a king who protects people. Brahmins have achieved a position of respect with their forgiveness. He advised Parashurama to wash his sins by pilgrimage to holy places. Accordingly Parashurama travelled for a year on pilgrimage.

Thus ended Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna who though taught and blessed by Shri Dattatreya forgot his teachings and as a result died a defeated person.

5.0 ADVICE TO ALARKA

Alarka belongs to the lineage of Ayu's son Kshatravriddha. He stands 25th from Manu Vaivaswat. He was the son of Ritudhwaja (Divodasa according to Bhagawat Purana) and mother Madalasa, daughter of Vishwavasu, the king of Gandharvas. Ritudhwaja had rescued Madalasa from the demon Patalketu after killing him. Patalketu's brother, in order to take revenge of his brother's death, once falsely told Madalasa that Ritudhwaja died during a battle. Believing this Madalasa gave up her life. The Naga king Ashwatar had two sons who were close friends of Ritudhwaja and loved him very much. On their entreaty Ashwatar did a penance and received a boon from Devi Saraswati as a result of which Madalasa was reborn as his daughter. When she grew up, he gave her in marriage to Ritudhwaja who subsequently succeeded his father to the throne.

Madalasa gave birth to four sons: Vikrant, Subahu and Shatrumardan and Alarka. The first three became ascetics having been taught metaphysical knowledge by their mother. Ritudhwaja prevented Madalasa from giving metaphysical knowledge to Alarka so that he could suceed him to the throne. Madalasa therefore instructed Alarka on morals and the art of ruling the kingdom. When Alarka married she presented him a ring containing a note on how a king should administer the kingdom. When Alarka was crowned a king Madalasa left with her husband to the forest.

Alarka ruled justly but always felt that he lacked the experience of real bliss and that something was missing in his life. Very soon, his brother Subahu learnt about his brother Alarka's progress. He felt jealous and prevailed upon the king of Kashi to send an envoy to Alarka with a message that he should hand over the kingdom to Subahu. Alarka refused and Subahu, with the help of the king of Kashi, defeated Alarka and conquered the kingdom.

Alarka remembered the ring presented by his mother. He opened the ring and found a message: 'When everything is lost, abandon your present advisors and seek company of learned sages.' Heeding this message, Alarka went and met Shri Dattatreya who assured him of removing his miseries at once. Then he asked for the reasons for his miseries. Alarka said that he was not bothered about material pleasures but his elder brother Subahu had grabbed his kingdom. He was feeling disenchanted but now being unattached felt neither sorrow nor joy. Dattatreya made Alarka aware of the fact that it was because of the knowledge he had imparted to him that the 'mist of attachment' had disappeared from his mind.

5.1 <u>Dattatreya's teachings to Alarka (Re: Markanda Purana)</u>:

"Even a little ego develops into a huge tree of ignorance. Affection is its trunk; home and family are its branches and wife and children are its leaves. Wealth and cereals are its flowers and happiness and sorrow are its fruits. Relation that emerges out of affection is its canopy. This tree continues growing and obscures the path of liberation. The tree is full of desires and those who sit under its shelter can never attain salvation. Felling of this tree is therefore of foremost importance for a person desirous of attaining 'Brahmajitva.'

“Getting rid of attachment is the first step towards liberation (*Moksha*). Once this step is achieved he will be free from sorrows and then unite with the Supreme. This unification is called *yoga*. It is essential for a seeker of *moksha* that he should renounce attachment for the worldly objects including close relations.

“Knowledge and renunciation are two sides of the same coin and one is necessary to give rise to the other. Just as home shelters the body and food gives energy to sustain it, knowledge helps to attain salvation. Opposite of knowledge is ignorance which is an impediment in the path of salvation. Every living being receives fruits of his actions, good or bad, and these fruits bind him to the birth and death cycles, preventing salvation. Only carrying out one’s duties without bothering for the fruits thereof can prevent this binding. Only after the fruits of action in the earlier births that have caused his rebirth are “burnt out” can a living being become liberated from the cycles.

“When yogis achieve yoga (i.e. the state of union with the Brahman), they live in Brahman. Attainment of this yoga state is difficult. One has to conquer his soul first. For this one has to practice breath control (*Pranayama*) for controlling of physical impurities, determination to control sins, self-restrains to control lust and contemplation on God.

“During this process a yogi faces many impediments that can divert a yogi’s mind from his goal. The yogi should therefore keep his mind occupied in the worship and continuous contemplation on God and seek solace in Him. He should control his senses and eat and sleep less. Once his physical and mental faults are removed and he attains unification with the Brahman through contemplation, then he never separates from the Supreme Being.”

To Alarka’s query about the daily routine of a yogi Shri Dattatreya tells him to observe the followingthe following:

Purity: “Respect and insult cause the feelings of love and hatred. Yogis understand insult as respect and vice versa. A yogi should therefore never attend social functions like *shraaddha* and marriage. He should not accept the hospitality of others and should avoid unnecessary journeys. A yogi should seek alms only after the householder and his family has eaten and only from those households whose inmates are gentle, religious and free from blemishes. He should only accept things like whey, milk, fruits, edible roots, gram flour etc. Before taking his meal, a yogi should offer his food to the five *Prana* deities in his body reciting the following mantras and making the offering after each mantra - *Pranaya Swaha, Apanaya Swaha, Samanaya Swaha, Udanaya Swaha, Vyanaya Swaha!*

Yama-Niyama: “Control of senses and greed, celibacy, renunciation and non-violence are the five resolutions (*Yama*) of a yogi. Control of anger, service to the Guru, sanctity, eating less and studying Vedas regularly are the five norms (*Niyama*) for a yogi. A yogi must practice meditation at a desolate place, forest, cave or peak of a mountain. A true celibate has full control over his speech, mind and action. He looks at iron and gold with the same indifference; he neither loves nor hates anybody.

Omkar: “Yogis who follow sincerely the *Yama* and *Niyama* restrictions never lose their supreme position. While contemplating on the Supreme they recite ***AUM*** which comprises of the three syllables 'A', 'U' and 'M' representing the three attributes (Gunas) *Sattva*, *Tama* and *Raja* respectively. But even then a yogi must guard against some disastrous traps that can make his entire penance useless.

Brahman: “Only when a yogi experiences extreme joy during meditation that he can experience Brahman; a true yogi does not mourn over the loss of physical body because he is immune to both sorrow and affection. But this is difficult to achieve.”

Alarka thanked Dattatreya and taking his permission, went back to the king of Kashi and told him to take the kingdom or hand it over to Subahu. The king asked why he, a *Kshatriya*, was renouncing the kingdom without fighting and Alarka replied that only Brahman is truth, everything else is false. He added that he was going to control his senses and gain perfection in yoga.

Subahu then told the Alarka that he had played a drama with the help of the king of Kashi in order to bring Alarka, who was leading a luxurious life but was not really happy with it, towards the path of salvation without any war or bloodshed. He would not have turned towards the path of salvation unless he

was pushed to misery. Now that he had achieved this he was also leaving renouncing everything. Subahu then, on king's request, advised him the importance of achieving the four duties of a man: Dharma (righteous living), Artha (earning livelihood), Kama (keeping the wife satisfied with sex) and *Moksha* (liberation). The king of Kashi returned the kingdom to Alarka who crowned his eldest son and retired to the forest where he practiced the teachings of his Guru Dattatreya and attained salvation.

It is clear that these teachings are rooted in Patanjali's Yoga-Sutras which though written in second century BC have material which dates much earlier since it has been mentioned in the Bhagvad-Gita as well as in the Shantiparva of the Mahabharata. It has been claimed that Patanjali himself received the knowledge from Shri Dattatreya. We are not in a position to comment on this.

6.0 ADVICE TO PARASHURAMA

Parashurama's story is historically linked to that of Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna as would be clear from the story of the latter described earlier.

The feud between the Haihayas and the Jamadagni family did not stop after Parashurama killed Sahasrarjuna. Sahasrarjuna's sons took revenge of the death of their father by attacking Jamadagni's *ashram* when Parashurama was away. In spite of the entreaties of Renuka (Parashurama's mother) they killed Jamadagni while he was in the state of meditation. Parashurama learnt of this when he returned and vowed to decimate the Kshatriyas who had killed a Brahmin. Parashurama took his father's corpse on one shoulder and mother Renuka on the other and set to go to the Ganges ((actually this must be Saraswati) to perform death rites. While passing through a forest he met Dattatreya in the form of an *Avadhuta*. Seeing Renuka he stopped Parashurama. Addressing Renuka as *Shakti* incarnate (Goddess Durga) he worshipped her. She blessed him and told him of her resolve to end her life. She also advised Parashurama to look up to Dattatreya for help when needed.

Later, after he had decimated the Kshatriyas twenty-one times he met Shri Rama (of Ramayana) who defeated and humbled him. But Shri Rama let him go because Parashurama was a Brahmin. Parashurama was dejected. Unexpectedly he met an *Avadhuta* whose name was Samvarta. He was Brihaspati's brother and used move around looking like a madman. When Parashurama asked him about the secret of his state he gave an explanation which Parashurama did not understand and when he requested for it again he directed him to Shri Dattatreya. Parashurama went in search of Dattatreya whom he finally found in the Gandhamadan Mountains.

The dialogue that followed is known as "*Datta-Bhargava Samvada*" (dialogue between Dattatreya and Bhargava i.e. Parashurama). In this dialogue, Shri Dattatreya explains to Parashurama the theory and practice of spiritual pursuit illustrating his statements by certain allegorical stories. It is a most complete guide to the spiritual path.

Parashurama, on meeting Dattatreya, prostrated before him. Shri Dattatreya narrated to him the greatness (*Mahatmya*) of Devi Tripura (the transcendental consciousness shining as the unique mirror of the wonderful universe). Parashurama became abstracted in devotion, his mind becoming still and purer. His eyes glowed in rapture and his hair stood on end and he could not hide his ecstasy. He then fell to the ground before his master Shri Dattatreya and expressed his gratitude requesting guidance about how to worship Devi Tripura. Having satisfied himself as to the fitness of Parashurama, whose zeal for and devotion to Tripura worship were intense he duly initiated him into the method of Her worship. He then permitted Parashurama to go to the Mahendra Hill to practice the sacred worship.

Parashurama practiced the worship of Devi Tripura for twelve years. One day he remembered his dialogue with Samvarta during which he was asked to obtain the explanation of what Samvarta had said from Shri Dattatreya. He pondered over and realized that he did not know anything about the workings of the universe, how is it created and how it would end and why it is transient though appearing to be permanent. He turned over in his mind his life from childhood to the present and realized that throughout his life he had strived to achieve his goals which changed from time to time; but in the end he had not really achieved anything worthwhile.

He thought, "The feeling that I should work hard and succeed for gaining happiness is really a misery. The feeling never goes and so also the misery. But in spite of this people, from a beggar in the street to a mighty emperor, continue to strive for apparent gains and continue to be miserable. On the other hand those who need not keep themselves busy in work and who are perfectly content and self-contained are happy. This is rather confusing." Being thus confused he decided to return to his Guru Shri Dattatreya and seek his advice.

Quickly reaching the Gandhmadan Mountain, he met his Guru and prostrated before him keeping his head on his feet. The Guru was happy to see Parashurama who then asked his permission to present certain doubts he had in mind. Shri Dattatreya gladly consented to remove the doubts.

7.0 TRIPURA RAHASYA (DATTA-BHRAGAVA DIALOGUE)

Parshurama recounted to his Guru his past actions about destroying all the Kshatriyas and being defeated by Shri Rama. He had felt mortified by the fact that Shri Rama had let him go because of his being of Brahmin birth. He had then met Samvarta, a wandering Avadhuta who was very effulgent but apparently deranged. Just being near him was refreshing and pleasant. He had asked Samvarta about the state he was living in and he had given his an explanation which he had not been able to understand. When asked to clarify, Samvarta had advised him to meet him (i.e. Shri Dattatreya) for explanation.

Samvarta had belittled both the path of actions (Karma) and the path of devotion. He had said that whatever he had gained after pleasing Indra the king of gods through actions like performance of the various rites and ceremonies was very trivial as far as happiness was concerned. This happiness was not really happiness *but a lesser misery*. Besides, nothing can mitigate the fear of death that results through one's actions. (N.B. The Karmas implied here are rituals like yajnas to please gods and not day to day actions.)

Devotion was just as imperfect as Karma. Transient devotional states cannot lead to intransient high Truth. Devotional practices are continuous and there seems to be no end to the obligatory duties enforced by devotion.

In spite of these strange atitudes, he had found Samvarta to be quite happy and completely free from any sense of obligation to act and thereby face disastrous results. He seemed to laugh at the ways of the world. How did he gain that state? And what did he tell me that I did not understand? Parshurama then prayed to Shri Dattatreya to kindly explain these points and rescue him from the jaws of Karma.

Dattatreya tells Parshuram that people are in the habit of engaging in work **under the sense of obligation**. It is very much necessary to **first investigate, then deliberate and finally use discrimination** before undertaking any action. For example Shri Rama, suffered because he did not use discrimination and judgment before attempting to capture the golden deer but later with due deliberation he crossed over to Lanka and conquered it.

Common people are confused and influenced by the sense of action. But as long as ignorance lasts there cannot be discernment. The Supreme Tripura Devi, the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the one consciousness of Shiva, who abides as the Self of self, is the one who controls your thoughts and shines the *Vichara* (meaning the discrimination, investigation, deliberation and judgment) in the mind and therefore should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru.

A pre-requisite for such worship is devotion and earnestness. A man without discrimination thinks that to have dispassion (*vairagya*) means to be miserable (*duhkha*) and that the pleasures of the body are the same as bliss (*sukha*). This ignorance leads to his suffering in the cycle of births and deaths. He commends Parashurama for having having transcended misery by becoming discriminating. **Association with the wise** helps to avoid misery and obtain salvation as could be seen from the fact that Parashurama himself had reached this stage of spiritual progresss only by his association with Samvarta. He then illustrates this point through the story of Prince Hemachuda and Hemlekha.

7.1 Story of Hemachuda and Hemlekha

Prince Hemachuda who had gone for hunting in the forest is caught in a storm and has to take shelter in the hermitage of Rishi Vyaghrapada where, the rishi being away, his foster daughter Hemalekha, a beautiful maiden welcomes him. Hemachuda falls in love with Hemalekha. Vyaghrapada on his return realizes this and gives her in marriage to Hemachuda.

Hemachuda does not know that under the tutelage of Vyaghrapada, Hemalekha herself has reached the spiritual level of a sage. He finds during their honeymoon that Hemalekha was not much interested in physical pleasures. When questioned she explains that physical pleasures are only of a temporary transient nature and desire for them can never be satisfied. The real happiness comes not by being slave to bodily pleasures but through realization of the Self (i.e. the soul). She teaches Hemachuda about meditation, control of mind and how, by becoming dispassionate, one can lead a normal life and enjoy the physical pleasures without being a slave to them. Thus, Hemachuda and later the whole family as well as other citizens are initiated into Self-realization.

Hemachuda being used to the physical pleasures over the years however misses them and feels guilty when he indulges in them. Hemalekha realizes his dilemma and gives him a discourse through a parable on the nature of an individual who is caught in the cycle of birth and death because he becomes a slave to sensory pleasures. In this parable she uses personifications of maind, intellect and other traits like desire, greed, anger etc. in man.

I-am-the body ignorance Out of the ignorance an individual identifies himself with his body not realizing that he is not the body but really the immortal soul that resides in the perishable body. The body dies at some stage and the individual is reborn again in another body but the individual is not aware of it. He likes to enjoy the sense pleasures i.e. the pleasures obtained through the five senses (touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell). The desires for these are created in the mind which has basically a fickle nature. His desire for these pleasures and means like wealth to get to them is never satisfied; as soon as a desire is satisfied he seeks more pleasures of the same or diverse kinds, thus becoming a slave to them. He becomes prey to greeed, anger, jealousy and arrogance. Actions done to satisfy these earthly desires finally bind him to the cycle of birth and death because of which he has to go through thousands of rebirths. He can come out of it only when in some birth, out of the grace of the Almighty, he develops discrimination to control his mind and becomes dispassionate i.e. free from the clutches of earthly desires. Then by making his mind steady and free of thoughts he realizes the Self i.e. the experience that he is really the soul and not the body. This realization is the key to his final liberation from birth and death cycles (*Moksha*).

To obtain Self realization an aspirant must find the company of a sage in whom he should have complete faith and whose words he should never doubt because the world runs on faith. Also one should not waste time on empty arguments while deliberating on his teachings.

Surrender to the Creator I-am-the body delusion or Maya that leads to desires for transient things like wealth, family etc. and leads to misery can be overcome only through the worship of God who is the Primal Cause or Creator of this universe. He cannot be realized by sensory means.

Judging from the magnitude of the creation, His power must be immeasurable. The Creator is perfect in Himself and creates the whole universe without any external aid and is able to protect and elevate His own creatures. One must therefore surrender to Him without reservation. If the Lord of the world be pleased, nothing will be withheld from the devotee. One can approach God for many reasons: for personal problems, to gain wealth etc., or one may simply dedicate oneself to Him.

In the case of the first type of devotees, God has to consider the course of destiny which was only ordained by Him. But for the selfless devotee, God is the sole Refuge and therefore He takes care of him without reference to the devotee's predestiny. **The notion that one cannot escape one's destiny is applicable only to the weak-minded.** Destiny is part of the natural framework of enforcing God's will; it cannot be prevented however its edge can be blunted by devotion to Him. This devotion is the first step towards the Divine Bliss.

God is formless God witnesses everything. It is He who generates, permeates, sustains and destroys the universe. He is Shiva, He is Vishnu, He is Brahman, the Sun, the Moon, etc. He is the One whom the different sects call their own; but He is not Shiva, nor Vishnu, nor Brahma nor any other exclusively. To assign the creator with a name like say Shiva and assign him a body would make the Creator an ordinary potter making pots endowed with a body and brain. The body is only a tool for a purpose and works through intelligence. Fools like to assign a body to the formless transcendental Being and worship it. But even then He shows them Grace, assuming such a body, for He is unique and fulfils the desires of His devotees.

Purity of intellect The universe manifests in all its variety in Devi Tripura, as if reflected in a self-luminous mirror. The reflection cannot be apart from the mirror and is therefore one with it. Shiva, Vishnu etc, conceptualized as bodies cannot be considered as one superior to the other since such concepts are applicable only to lower order of beings. Regarding mother Tripura Devi, o*ne can know the mother only if one knows the Self.* This self is within you but it is neither visible nor can be described. It can be realized with the help of pure intellect. *Therefore first the intellect must be made pure and then only nature of the Self should be investigated.*

Self remains realized at all times An aspirant does not realize that the Self remains realized at all times. When thoughts are controlled a blank darkness becomes visible. *In the short interval of time between the two, i.e. the control of mind and appearance of darkness there remains a state free from the effort to control and the perception of darkness.* <u>That is the state of perfect and transcendental happiness</u>. *All are deceived in that state because their minds are accustomed to be turned outward and therefore do not manage to remain in that holy state.* Realization is attained only by staying still not by intellect but by <u>cessation</u> of thought. <u>Any effort</u> will always make it recede. People who have not achieved Self-realization are unaware of this Truth and inherit sorrow.

Certain Preconceived notions stand as obstacles in the path of Self-Realization. Some of them are: (i) Identification of the body with the Self resulting ultimately into birth-death cycles. (ii) Considering the world to be different from the Self which really is Consciousness and the mirror on which the phenomena are simply reflected. (iii) Considering other beings to be mutually different and different from the universal Self. Man is not finally redeemed until he has extricated himself from these numberless notions of ignorance.

Hemalekha teaches Hemachuda to remain in the state of *Sahajasamadhi* in which he is *perpetually* in the state of Samadhi at the same time performing his normal duties.

Concluding this story Shri Dattatreya again reiterates the point made earlier that the primary cause of emancipation was association with the wise and therefore he should follow that advice immediately.

7.2 Parashurama's doubts (1) Parashurama however is not convinced that the objective universe can merely be the consciousness which is not seen but only inferred, and asks his Guru to elaborate on the issue. Continuing with his discourse Shri Dattatreya says,

7.2.1 Projection on the screen of Consciousness "All that is seen must have newly appeared at some time and therefore there must be an antecedent cause for it. The world changes every moment and therefore must be getting born every moment. There different theories about the nature of the universe but all agree that universe has an origin though Charvakas think that it is accidental in origin. But universe cannot be an accident because without cause and effect relationship there cannot a harmony in nature. The cause may be obvious or may have to be inferred every event being a product of a certain condition or conditions." (Shri Dattatreya now goes into intricate discussion about some theories of the creation of the universe none of which can satisfactorily account for creation.)

Shri Dattatreya then stresses that the universe must have a Creator, and He must be an intelligent principle, but He cannot be of any known type because of the vastness of the creation. His power is past understanding and is dealt with in the Scriptures, whose authority is incontrovertible. However one cannot confuse the creation with the Creator, the unbounded consciousness. The creation must be considered merely as a picture drawn by him on Self. There is no place beyond consciousness and Consciousness is inescapable.

Universe cannot be conceived without consciousness which covers in entirely. The Supreme God is thus the embodiment of pure Consciousness. This whole universe consisting of the mobile and the immobile, arises from, abides in, and resolves into Him. This is the final and well-known conclusion of the Scriptures. The creation is not an object apart; it is a picture drawn on the canvas of supreme consciousness, for there cannot possibly be anything beyond Perfection. Imagination on the contrary, is impractical. The universe has thus originated only as an image on the surface of the mirror of the Absolute. This conclusion is in harmony with all facts. Just as castles in the air are mental figments of men so also is this creation a mental figment of Shiva. Shiva is absolute Awareness, without any form. Shri Tripura is Shakti (energy) and Witness of the whole. That Being is perfect all round and remains undivided.

Time and space are the factors of division in the world; of these, space refers to the location of objects and time to the sequence of events. Time and space are themselves projected from consciousness.

7.2.2 <u>Consciousness the illuminator</u> The fact of the existence of things is only illumination of them, and nothing more. Such illumination pertains to Consciousness alone. The things of the world have no substance in them outside of the cognising factor, viz., Intelligence.

Note that objects are clearly pictured in the mind even when those objects are unreal. How does it happen? The place of objects is taken up by the peculiar imaginative quality of the mind. When such imagination is deep, it takes shape as creation; thus you see that consciousness was absolute and pure before creation and its peculiar quality or will brought about this image of the world in it.

So the world is nothing but an image drawn on the screen of consciousness; it differs from a mental picture in its long duration; that is again due to the strength of will producing the phenomenon.

The universe appears practical, material and perfect because <u>the will determining its creation is perfect and independent</u>; whereas the human conceptions are more or less transitory according to the strength or the weakness of the will behind them. A magician's creations are only transitory; a yogi's creations may be permanent; both are external to the creator, whereas the divine creation cannot be apart from the omnipresent Lord. Because the Lord of consciousness is infinite, the creation can remain only within Him and the contrary is pure fancy. Since the Universe is only a projection from and in the mirror of consciousness, its unreal nature can become clear only on investigation, and not otherwise. Distinguish between the changeless truth and the changeful untruth and scrutinize the world comprised of these two factors, changeful phenomena and changeless subjective consciousness, like the unchanging light of the mirror and the changing images in it.

The world cannot stand investigation because of its changing unreal nature. The world appears real in the light of ignorance and disappears before right analysis. Long intervals of space reflected in the mirror are themselves in it and yet unreal. "Thus the universe is only the Self - the One and one only."

Parashurama then asks how the universe appears to be real to him as well as to others. Shri Dattatreya now explains the the cause of the illusion which makes one believe the world to be real. He says,

“Even the gross body becomes mistaken for crystal-clear consciousness by mere force of habit. Similarly, the universe has repeatedly been taken to be real so that it now looks as if it were actually real. The remedy lies in a change of outlook. He then tells the story of prince Mahasena and the yogi son of the Yogi Tangana.

7.3 Story of Prince Mahasena and the Yogi

King Susena of Vanga decides to perform a horse sacrifice (*Ashwamedha*) and as is the custom, sends the sacrificial horse to roam around under the protection of his princes leading a detachment of army. Anybody courageous enough to capture the horse has to fight the army and become the king’s subject if defeated. When the entourage reaches the banks of River Irawati, they pass the hermitage of Rishi Tangana who is in the state of *samadhi*. His son (who is also a great yogi) however notices that the entourage has passed by without showing any respect for his father. He becomes angry and captures the horse. When he is attacked by the army, he enters the nearby hill with the horse and disappears. When the army attacks the hill the son comes out with a huge army and destroys Susena’s army taking many including the

princes as prisoners. When king Susena learns about this he deputes his brother Mahasena to meet the Rishi, gain his pleasure and liberate the horse the princes.

Mahasena sets forth to the Hermitage of Rishi Tangana where he prostrates before the Rishi. The rishi however is in deep meditation and does not reply. The prince waits for three days at the end of which the Rishi's son who was watching him all the feels pleased at the reverence shown by the prince towards his father and offers to fulfill his wishes since his father was in the state of *samadhi* to last for twelve years of which seven still remained. Mahasena expresses his desire to speak to his father and having given the promise the son himself goes into *samadhi* and communicates with his father. The Rishi comes out of the *samadhi* and chides his son for being influenced by anger which had caused disruption of an important ritual like a horse sacrifice. He tells him that penance was possible only because a king protects the yogis against obstruction and instructs his son to release the horse and the princes immediately.

Mahasena sends the princes and the horse away but himself remains in the hermitage to satisfy his curiosity about the miraculous events he had noticed. He expresses his desire to the sage to learn about how the horse and the princes were concealed in the hill. The sage informs him that he himself used to be an emperor but had abdicated his throne in favour of his sons to go to forest for penance. This son was born unto him from his wife who had accompanied him to the forest. He had initiated him in yoga and with the powers thus gained he was able by the force of his will to create a world of his own inside this hill which he is now ruling. The horse and princes were kept there. On Mahasena's request the sage asks his son to show him his world inside the hill and then returns to the state of *samadhi*.

The son takes Mahasena to the hill which he himself can enter easily by his yogic powers but Mahasena cannot. Using his powers he makes Mahasena leave his body, which he hides in a hole in the ground and takes him inside the hill.

7.3.1 <u>World inside the hill</u> Mahasena sees inside a world similar to the outside world including the various *lokas* like *Satyaloka*, *Vaikuntha* and *Kailas* in this world. After staying thee for one day they return to the outside of the hill where Mahasena to his surprise sees there is a complete change in the environment. The people, the river courses, the trees, the tanks, etc., are all different. The son explains that one day that they had spent in his world inside the hill was equivalent to 12000 years of the outside world. The changes he was seeing were the changes that have occurred during the 12000 years and none of his family was alive. His country Vanga is now a jungle infested with wild animals. His brother's descendant is reigning in Malwa and his own descendant is reigning in the Dravida country on the banks of the Tamraparni.

Mahasena is overcome by grief at the loss of his family but is comforted by the yogi's son who tells him that this grief was useless because his forefathers were also dead and he had never mourned for them. He urges Mahasena to ponder over the question as to who he really was. Is he the body or something else? The body is merely a conglomerate of different substances and there is no moment in which each of the components is not changing. The people whom you call your family are mere bodies; the bodies are composed of earth; when lost, they return to earth; and earth resolves ultimately into energy. So there is really no loss. When you say "my" body how can you be the body? In fact you are not the body which you discard on death just like a garment. Mahasena thinks over this and surrenders to the Rishi's son to become his disciple.

Consequently the Rishi's son explains to him that events in a dream are real while the dream lasts but appear false on awakening. However events in wakeful state are also real while it lasts and become an illusion during the dream state. The appearance of the hills, the seas and the earth itself is constantly changing and therefore they cannot be classed as permanent. There is no unbroken continuity in any object because every new appearance implies a later disappearance. But continuity cannot be denied in the fundamentals underlying the objects. Similarly, dream and wakefulness resemble each other in their discontinuous harmony. This discontinuity defines it as an illusion because it does not last.

7.3.2 <u>World created by steady Will</u> He tells that this world is the result of Brahma's desire. It looks real and permanent because the original desire is so powerful. If Mahasena wishes to create a world that

would endure then he must practice focusing of thought which has to be forceful. In addition he must not be aware of the thought because that will disturb the focusing.

Referring to the universe inside the hill he had created, he explains how such a vast world could fit in a small hill and how the time scales could be so different. The relation between space and objects and between time and events is created by the senses; there is no intrinsic relationship between them. There is nothing outside the domain of the senses. He asserts that his world is also real but it would disappear instantly if he stops contemplating it. He further tells that just as the dream creations are pictures moving on the mind screens, so also this earth world including him is the frontage of the picture depicted by pure intelligence and it is nothing more than an image in a mirror. He then advises Mahasena to realize that the Self is the self-contained mirror projecting and manifesting this world. The Self is pure unblemished consciousness and that he should quickly realize it and gain transcendental happiness.

The world cannot be demonstrably ascertained. Space is simply void serving for the location of materials. The universe is, always and all-through, a phenomenon in the Self. The question then arises how consciousness, being void, is dense at the same time. Just as a mirror, though, dense and impenetrable, contains the image, so also pure consciousness is dense and impenetrable and yet displays the universe by virtue of its self-sufficiency. Though consciousness is all-pervading, dense and single, it still holds the mobile and immobile creation within it, wonderful in its variety, with no immediate or ultimate cause for it. And like the mirror it remains unaffected by the passage of different images and yet continues to reflect as clearly as before, so also the one consciousness illumines the waking and dream states which can be verified by proper meditation. The absolute consciousness being self-sufficient manifests within itself what looks 'exterior', just like a mirror reflecting space as external to itself.

7.3.3 <u>Prakriti</u>* <u>and</u> *<u>Chitta</u> The anamnesis (memory of karmas in previous lifetimes) goes by the name of *Prakriti* in dreamless slumber, and Chitta in the other states. It is always comprised of the insentient phase of the tendencies of the mind and the sentient phase of intelligence. Therefore the mind (*chitta*) is *purusha* (the individual) when the sentient phase is assertive, and the same is *avyakta* (unmanifest) when *prakriti* (nature), the insentient phase, is assertive. That *chitta* is tripartite according to its functions, namely, ego, intellect and mind. The diversities in creation are solely due to qualifications limiting the consciousness; these qualifications (i.e., body, limiting of age) are the mental imagery of the creator (consistent with the individual's past merits); when the creative will-force wears away there is dissolution and complete undifferentiation results.

7.3.4 Parashurama's doubts (2) Parshurama however has some new doubts: (1) How can this intelligence (Consciousness) which always remains as pure knowledge itself and is therefore beyond cognition. Then how can it be realized? (2) What is the nature of liberation, the goal of an aspirant? If one can be liberated while alive, how is the course of his emancipated life regulated? (3) How can sages engage in action while they live all the time in absolute consciousness? (4) How does one explain the differences noticed in the lives of the jnanis? Some of them are active; some teach scriptures; some worship deities; some abstract themselves into samadhi; some lead an austere life and emaciate themselves etc. How can there be such differences in their lives when there can be no difference in the state of liberation common to all? Or are there grades in knowledge and liberation?

Thus requested Shri Dattatreya is pleased with the questions and commended him for being on the right path of investigation ascribing it to the Grace of God. He remarked that Parashurama has rightly **understood** the nature of consciousness but **has not realized it** and that **without experience knowledge of a thing is no knowledge at all.** To corroborate this last statement he narrates a third story about the sage Ashtavakra and King Janaka of Videha.

7.4 Story of Ashtavakra

Varuna, the God of the waters, wants to perform a sacrifice to propitiate Goddess Tripura when king Janaka was also performing a similar sacrifice. Brahmins, learned people, hermits, those well-versed in the Vedas and *yajnas* who were attending King Janaka's sacrifice ceremony refuse to attend Varuna's ceremony. This enrages Varuna's son Varuni who thinks of a stratagem to lure them away from King Janaka.

He comes to King Janaka's gathering and challenges the attending sages to a debate laying the condition that he would debate one sage at a time and if he defeats the opponent then he will throw him in the sea which of course is Varuna's kingdom. This is agreed upon. Varuni defeats the sages one by one through fallacious logic and consigns them all to the sea where they are made to attend Varuna's yajna. That includes the sage Kahola who has a learned son named Ashtavakra. As soon as Ashtavakra hears about his father's defeat he hastens to Janaka's court, challenges Varuni, defeats him and insists that he be sunk in the sea. This exposes Varuni who restores back all the men formerly drowned in the sea. The sages praise Ashtavakra who gets puffed up with pride and starts behaving offensively before the assembled court. The sages are helpless.

Just then, a female ascetic in hermit's clothes and with matted hair comes there and is highly honoured by the king. The offended assembly looks to her for help. She then speaks to Ashtavakra in sweet and yet firm tones.

She charges Ashtavakra of speaking only book knowledge and not the one he has experienced. Ashtavakra is defeated in the debate with her and surrenders to her.

7.4.1 Knowing Reality She then explains to him that there was no one in the assembly who had experienced Reality (Self or Brahman) except the king Janaka and herself. Experiencing Reality was not a subject for discussion because even the most brilliant logic can only approach it but never attain it. It can however be realized by service to one's Guru and the grace of God. No one can know his own self through teaching of others. He has to realize it for himself which can be done only if his mind is turned inwards. A lamp does not require to be illuminated by other lights in order to be seen. It is the same with the Self. She adds,

"That Self or Consciousness (which is knowable as well as unknowable) is absolute and transcends the three states (wakefulness, dream and slumber) and comprises the entire universe making it manifest. Nothing can be apprehended without its light. Nothing can be apparent to a person if there be no consciousness. Even the awareness of your unawareness (in sleep) requires the light of Consciousness. However learned and proficient a person may be the Self cannot be realized as long as thoughts crop up and the mind is not inward. Mind cannot turn inwards unless there is an absence of desire. After the state of dispassion has been reached one can reach the stage of existing as the Self spontaneously without effort. That stage is realized after thoughts are eliminated and investigation ceases. After that you will know all and understand the significance of its being knowable and unknowable at the same time. Thus realizing the unknowable, one abides in immortality for ever and ever.

She bids good-bye saying that his doubts will be answered by king Janaka. Ashtavakra then has discussions with King Janaka who reiterates that Self is neither unknowable nor remains unknown at any moment.

7.4.2 What is Perception Abstract Intelligence being the Self of the seeker, is not cognizable because there is no other agent to know the Self or the light by which to know it. On the other hand all objects are seen by the illumination of the Consciousness who is the illuminator. Though we think that body perceives objects through its sense organs, in reality it is the Self or abstract intelligence that perceives the objects though a person thinks that he or she does. Perception of an object implies the assumption of its shape by the intellect.

Ashtavakra remarks that since in sleep there are no thoughts it should bring Self-Realization. The king replies that in sleep the mind is abstracted but it is veiled by the darkness of sleep and rendered unfit for illumining thoughts.

7.4.3 Abstract Intelligence The three states, namely, Samadhi, sleep and the momentary instant of cognition of objects, are characterized by absence of disturbance. Absolute Reality is manifest in Samadhi; a void or unmanifest condition distinguishes sleep and diversity is the characteristic of cognition in wakefulness. The illuminant is however the same all through and is always unblemished. Therefore it is said to be abstract intelligence.

In Samadhi and sleep states their experience persists unbroken for some appreciable period and can be recapitulated after waking up. The experience of cognition because of its fleeting nature goes unrecognized. But samadhi and sleep also cannot be recognized when they are only fleeting.

7.4.4 **Distinction between Sleep and Samadhi** There are two states of mind: (1) Illumination and (2) Consideration. Illumination is association of the mind with external objects and is unqualified by the limitations of objects. Consideration is deliberation on the object seen and the deliberation is qualified by the limitations pertaining to the objects seen; the objects are clearly identified or defined only after the deliberation. Deliberation is again of two kinds: the one is the actual experience and is said to be fresh, whereas the other is cogitation over the former and is called memory. The mind always functions in these two ways.

Dreamless slumber (*Sushupti*) is characterized by the illumination of sleep alone and is ignorance and the experience continues unbroken for a time; whereas the wakeful state is characterized by deliberation repeatedly broken up by thoughts and therefore it is said not to be ignorance. Sleep is a state of nescience though it consists of illumination alone yet it is said to be ignorance for the same reason as a light though luminous is said to be insentient.

Samadhi is simply absence of thoughts. Such a state prevails in sleep and at odd moments of wakefulness. Yet, it is not called Samadhi proper, because all the tendencies of the mind are still there in a latent state, ready to manifest the next instant. The infinitesimal moment of seeing an object is not tainted by deliberation on its qualities and is exactly like Samadhi.

Fleeting Samadhi is indeed being experienced by all, even in their busy moments; but it passes unnoticed by them, for want of familiarity with it. Every instant free from thoughts and musings in the wakeful state is the condition of Samadhi.

But in Samadhi, Brahman, the Supreme Consciousness, is continuously glowing. She is the one that engulfs time and space, is the destroyer of void, and the pure being - How can She be the ignorance of sleep? Therefore sleep is not the end-all and the be-all."

The cycle of births and deaths is caused by ignorance which displays itself as pleasure and pain and yet is only a dream and unreal. Being so, the wise say that it can be ended by knowledge i.e. the wisdom born of realization: viz., "I am That".

Only Savikalpa Samadhi can eradicate ignorance. Nirvikalpa Samadhi can never do it because Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the mere experience of that which is an unqualified expanse of intelligence which is in harmony with everything (including ignorance). It is like the canvas used in painting; the canvas remains the same whatever picture may be painted on it. Unqualified knowledge is simple light; the objects are manifest by and in it.

But in Savikalpa state there is a contamination of thoughts but that state itself is not ignorance or delusion. Pure intelligence (God) in His insentient aspect functions as Maya projecting ignorance as creation. The original cause lies in the knowledge of perfection in the Self.

Why fall into Nirvikalpa Samadhi, without gaining the fruit of its wisdom! Even if he should experience it a hundred times it will not liberate the individual. Therefore momentary Samadhis in the state of wakefulness are fruitless.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi is characterized by the experience of the true Self alone, namely, Pure Intelligence. Though eternal and resplendent even ordinarily, this Abstract Intelligence is as if it did not exist. Abstract Intelligence is the background on which the phenomena are displayed, and it must certainly manifest itself in all its purity, in they absence, although its appearance may look new at first. It remains unrecognized because it is not distinguished from the phenomena displayed by it. On their being eliminated it becomes apparent. This in short is the method of Self-Realization.

7.4.5 **Desire for liberation** God inherent as the self is pleased by meritorious actions which if continued through several births (even millions) the desire for liberation dawns. To be born a sentient being requires

good luck; even so to acquire a human body requires considerable merit; while it is out of the ordinary for human beings to be endowed with both virtuous tendencies and sharp intellect. Note that human beings form but a small fraction of the animate world, while most human beings are little more than animals, being ignorant of good and bad, and of right and wrong. A few learned people long for heaven after death. Of the remaining few, most of them have their intellects bedimmed by Maya and cannot comprehend the oneness of all (the Creator and creation). Some people go beyond this but many know only the theory and waste their time in fallacious logic. Only those who transcend Maya and please the Goddess of the Self with their devotion can discern well and happily. They then become established in transcendental Oneness and become absorbed.

Janaka then told him the scheme of liberation which is essentially the same as what has been stataed in the beginning (see the First Story).

7.4.6 <u>Different classes of *Jnanis*</u> Dattatreya further explains why different jnanis behave differently. Dividing jnanis into three classes: (1) the best, (2) middle class and (3) the lowest he explains that:

The **lowest class** of jnanis, though they have achieved Self-realization yet they are influenced by the pleasures and pains accruing to them according to their *prarabdha* (past karma).

Jnanis of the the **middle class** however even while reaping the fruits of their past karma are firmer in their internal happiness like men inebriated with drink.

Jnanis of the **highest order** are never detached from the enjoyment of their bliss even if confronted with a million times more *prarabdha*; they are not surprised at the most unnatural and miraculous happenings; they are not elated by the greatest pleasures, nor depressed by the worst miseries. They are always peaceful and calm within, although they appear to act like common folk.

These differences are due to the differences in their intellects and to the degrees of development of Jnana (wisdom). Their activities depend on their predispositions as determined by their past karma. But all their actions are like those of a drunken man.

There are differences in states of *jnana* characterized by the aspects and attitudes of intellect and the varieties in its activities" Such differences are quite obvious in Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Siva (the Destroyer) who are jnanis by nature. That does not mean that jnana (realization) admits of variety. These attitudes depend on their *vasanas* (dispositions) and environments. They are Lords of the universe and all-knowing. Their *jnana* is pure and uncontaminated by what they do. Whether a *jnani* is fair or dark in complexion, his *jnana* neither shares these qualities nor the qualities of the mind. As an example we have atri and his sons, Vasishta, Sanak, Sananadan, Sanatkumar, Sanatsujata, Nartada, Ushanas Shukra, Brihaspati, Vyasa, king Janaka and so on who are *jnanis* with differing temperaments.

7.4.7 <u>Three types of *vasanas*</u> There are three types of predispositions or *vasanas*: (1) Aparadha (fault) is the disposition to doubt the teachings of the Guru and the holy books, (2) Karma (action) disposition to be unable to enter the stage of contemplation necessary for annihilating the *vasanas*. However well-taught they cannot grasp the teachings because their minds are cramped with predispositions, and (3) Kama (desire). This third group is the most common, consisting of the victims of desire who are always obsessed with the sense of duty leading to a desire to work for some end.

Of the three typical *vasanas* mentioned above the ***vasana* of action** is the most potent and is said to be **same as ignorance**. He whose mind clings to the ignorance of the necessity of work cannot hope for realization even if Shiva offers to instruct him. Similarly also the person who has the fault of marked indifference to or misunderstanding of the teachings cannot attain realisation. (NB: This discussion applies to *jnanis* and not aspirants.)

The *vasana* due to desire is not a very serious obstruction to realization, and if one is free from the fault of mistrust of the Master's teachings (*Apraadha*), is destroyed by the practice of contemplation. Dispassion need not be very marked in this case. Such people need not repeatedly engage in the study of Scriptures or the receiving of instructions from the Master, but straightaway pass into meditation and fall into

samadhi, the consummation of the highest good. They live evermore as Jivanmuktas (emancipated even while alive).

Those who are free from all *vasanas* and particularly from the least trace of action-*vasana* are the best of the *jnanis*. They are sages with subtle and clear intellect have not considered it worth while to eradicate their desire etc., by forcing other thoughts to take their place because desires do not obstruct realisation. Therefore their desires continue to manifest even after realization as before it. Neither are they tainted by such *vasanas*. They are said to be emancipated and diverse-minded.

On the other hand, a man only slightly affected by these two *vasanas*, and much more so by desires or ambitions will, by repeated hearing of the holy truth, discussion of the same and contemplation on it surely reach the goal though only with considerable difficulty and after a long lapse of time. Such a sage's activities will be small because he is entirely engrossed in his efforts for realisation. (Note. - His activities will be confined to the indispensable necessities of life.) A sage of this class has by his long practice and rigorous discipline controlled his mind so well that predispositions are totally eradicated and the mind is as if dead. **He belongs to the middle class in the scheme of classification** of sages and is said to be a sage without mind. Therefore he is not affescted by *Prarabdha* (past *karma*).

"**The last class and the least among the sages are those whose practice and discipline are not perfect enough to destroy mental predispositions.** Their minds are still active and the sages are said to be associated with their minds. They are barely *jnanis* and not *jivanmuktas* as are the other two classes. They appear to share the pleasures and pains of life like any other man and will continue to do so till the end of their lives. They will be emancipated after death.

The *prarabdha* of *jnanis* is still active and sprouts in the mind but only to be burnt up by the steady flame of *jnana* and since these are scorched at their source there is neither pain nor pleasure.

"*Jnanis* of the highest order however, are seen to be active because they voluntarily bring out the *vasanas* from the depth of the mind and allow them to run out. Their action is similar to that of a father sporting with his child, moving its dolls, laughing at the imagined success of one doll over another, and appearing to grieve over the injury to another and so on. The *vasanas* not inimical to realization are not weeded out by the best class of jnanis because they cannot seek new ones to crowd the old out. Therefore the old ones continue until they are exhausted. Thus you find among them some highly irritable, some lustful and others pious and dutiful, and so on.

"Now, the lowest order of jnanis still under the influence of their minds know that there is no truth in the objective universe. Their *samadhi* is not different from that of the rest.

Samadhi is being aware of the Self, and nothing else. It should not be confounded with the Nirvikalpa (undifferentiated) state, for this state is very common and frequent as has been pointed out in the case of momentary *samadhis*. Every one is experiencing the Nirvikalpa state, though unknowingly. But such unrecognized *samadhis* are of no use. This experience alone does not confer any lasting benefit. But one may apply the experience to reach Sahaja-samadhi state (which is perpetual) and conduct the practical affairs of life .

7.4.8 About Hathayogis A similar state of unrecognized Samadhi becomes possible to the hatha yogis also but they cannot remain in such a state. In the *jnani's* samadhi, both the veil of ignorance and perturbation of thoughts are removed. In the hatha yogi's samadhi, though the Self is naturally free from the two obstacles, yet it remains hidden by the veil of ignorance. The same is torn off by the *jnani* in the process of his contemplation. For a *jnani*, the Self shines in its full effulgence like the Sun unobstructed in the heavens whereas for a hathayogi the mind being associated with *sattva* (quality of brightness) acts in *samadhi* as a thin veil (like light mist) for the self-effulgent principle which differs from sleep only in that in sleep it is like the sun of self covered by dark dense clouds.

This is how the sages describe samadhi. "Samadhi is absolute knowledge uncontaminated by objects. Such is the state of the best *jnanis* even when they take part in the affairs of the world." Since the middle class of jnanis have already destroyed their minds, there are no objects for them. Their state is known as

the supramental one. The mind is agitated when it assumes the shape of those objects which it mistakes for real and unagitated otherwise. Therefore the latter state alone is supramental. **Since a *jnani* of the highest order can engage in several actions at the same time and yet remain unaffected, he is always many-minded and yet remains in unbroken Samadhi (*Sahajasamadhi*). His is absolute knowledge free from objects.**

(Tripura rahasya also contains chapters on Vidya Gita and a chapter which gives dialogue between Prince Hemangada and a Bramarakshasa. But the contents are not very different from what has been summarized earlier.)

8.0 TRIPURA DEVI AND THE TANTRIC CONNECTION

We have seen that Dattatreya we worship today is in the image created by the Puranas through the myths of his birth stories. The earliest image of Dattatreya presented in Mahabharata as preceptor of Sahasrarjuna is that of a yogi sage and Siddha powerful enough to confer boons on the king. Between these two images lies the image of Dattatreya as a Tantric guru or deity as suggested by stories of his appearance with woman indulging in amorous activuties and eating meat.

It appears that Dattatreya worship was adopted by Natha sect which was an offshoot of Sahajayana sect which itself is rooted in the Buddhist sects. Thus it is not surprising that Dattatreya recommends worship of Devi in the form of Tripura Devi and assigns Her highest attaributes even identifying her as Brahman as Consciousness and creator of the universe as can be seen from the following statements in Tripura Rahasya:

Ch I (19-22). Being thus requested, Datta Guru satisfied himself as to the fitness of Parasurama, whose zeal for and devotion to Tripura worship were intense; and he duly initiated him into the method of Her worship.

Ch I (71-72) Therefore that Tripura, the Supreme Force, the Being of all beings, the one consciousness of Siva, who abides as the Self of self, should be worshipped sincerely, exactly as taught by the Guru. The fore-runner of such worship is devotion and praiseworthy earnestness. That is why *mahatmya* of Devi Tripura was explained to you so that you are endowed with *Vichara* which is the only way to attain the highest Good when it takes root.

Ch VII (79-93) The universe manifests in all its variety in Devi Tripura, as if reflected in a self-luminous mirror. The reflection cannot be apart from the mirror and is therefore one with it. Siva, Vishnu etc, conceptualized as bodies cannot be considered as one superior to the other since such concepts are applicable only to lower order of beings.

Ch IX (Regarding mother Tripura Devi): O*ne can know the mother only if one knows the Self.* This self is within you but it is neither visible nor can be described. It can be realized with the help of pure intellect. *Therefore first the intellect must be made pure and then only nature of the Self should be investigated.*

Ch XIV (44-45) Such illumination is Her Transcendental Majesty Tripura, the Supreme. She is called Brahma in the Vedas, Vishnu by the Vaishnavites, Siva by the Shaivaites, and Shakti by the Shaktas. There is indeed nothing but She (who is the illuminant and the universal Consciousness). Just as the image is part and parcel of the clear, smooth, compact and one mirror, so also the universe as part and parcel of the perfect, solid and unitary consciousness, namely the Self.

Ch XVIII (127-130) Until these two blemishes are washed away by the holy waters of investigation into the Self, neither I, nor Brahma the Creator, nor Vishnu, nor Siva, nor even Sri Tripura the Goddess of Wisdom, can help that person to be emancipated. Therefore, surmount these two hurdles and remain eternally happy.

Ch XIX (51-56) Her transcendental Majesty, the absolute-Consciousness Tripura originally pictured the whole universe in Her being, like images in a mirror. She took up the individuality, named Hiranyagarbha the golden egg (the Creator) that contained the embryonic individuals. Considering the predispositions of the (the embryonic individuals enclosed in that egg, She unfolded the Scriptures - the reservoir of sublime

truths - for the fulfillment of desires. Since the embryonic individuals were full of unfulfilled desires Hiranyagarbha began to think out the means of their fulfillment. He elaborated a scheme of cause and effect, of actions and fruits, and consequently subjecting the individuals born later on to revolve in that wheel of cause and effect. They take different shapes and are placed in different environments consistently with their predispositions. After passing through innumerable species, the individual evolves as a human being owing to the merit he has accumulated. At first he will take to selfish pursuits. With …….

Thus we see that in Tripura Rahasya in contrast with other Datta-Tradition texts like Gurucharitra etc, where Lord Shiva is the preferred deity we have Devi as preferred deity.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj

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